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**EXPATRIATE WRITING:  
POST-TRAUMA, POSTMEMORY AND THE POSTCOLONIAL**

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by

**Melanie Simone Dilly**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in German and Comparative Literature

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## **Abstract**

This thesis describes the relationship between post-Second World War discourses and postcolonialism as observed in a selection of works by expatriate ‘postmemory’ authors after the Second World War and the Indian Partition. With global consequences which are still felt today, the Holocaust can no longer be understood as a singled-out event. Through their various works, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, and W.G. Sebald offer a range of comparable strategies for further personal engagement with the past – not just in Europe or in South Asia, but in both places together.

The thesis shows that the expatriate writer – defined by his or her temporal and spatial distance from the subject matter – can be understood not only as someone who mediates between there and here, but also between past and present. Thinking of the expatriate writer as someone between two worlds is technically reminiscent of the traumatised person who is unable to negotiate between the two worlds of victims and outsiders. The expatriate writer can make use of rupture, distance, and partial identity, and is therefore in a privileged position when it comes to highlighting incomplete (hi)stories.

The fictional texts examined in this thesis are examples of multidirectional memory in several ways: firstly through the connection to other nations’ histories and secondly through reaching out to the reader. The reader’s active engagement with the text is fundamental in the process of establishing meaning, which at the same time challenges the status of master narratives. Even if hardly anyone speaks of a traumatic style, this is where I would ultimately situate this research, as to varying degrees these works use narrative strategies that already include and point to another trauma, be that the Second World War or colonialism.

## Abbreviations

- A Sebald, W.G. *Austerlitz*. 2001. München: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2008. Print. Bibliothek - Süddeutsche Zeitung 93.
- BB Desai, Anita. *Baumgartner's Bombay*. 1988. London: Vintage, 1998. Print.
- EC Eliot, T.S. "East Coker." *Four quartets*. 1943. London: Faber & Faber, 1979. 23–32. Print.
- MC Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. 1981. London: Vintage, 2006. Print.
- RS Sebald, W.G. *Die Ringe des Saturn: Eine englische Wallfahrt*. 1995. 12th ed. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2012. Print.
- SL Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*. 1988. London: John Murray, 2011. Print.

## Introduction

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In recent years, comparative approaches in genocide studies have gained in significance. There was a demand for a shift from transhistorical comparisons to historical connections in the research field; Martin Shaw, for example, contributed to a reorientation of international genocide studies away from an exclusive focus on international *responses* to genocide towards the international dimension of genocide *production*. With reference to Henry Huttenbach, Shaw furthermore describes the comparative mode in genocide studies as a “hard-won gain over the idea of Holocaust ‘uniqueness’” (648). Memory studies have experienced a similar development and struggles in recent decades. With the turn of the millennium, a handful of researchers violated a hitherto unwritten law which would dismiss any attempt to compare the Holocaust. Michael Rothberg describes this as “competition and the zero-sum game” (“Multidirectional Memory” 133): the Holocaust is viewed as unique in history. Comparing other atrocities to the Holocaust, so it was feared, would automatically take away from the suffering of Holocaust victims. According to this so-called ‘antirealist approach’, the Holocaust is “not knowable” and can therefore not “be captured in traditional representational schemata” (for a more detailed exploration of the ‘antirealist approach’ in Holocaust studies see Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism* 3–7). It is doubtful, however, whether it is of any practical use to put the topic on a pedestal, above (or as Rothberg says, “beyond”; *Traumatic Realism* 4) any other discourse and knowledge. Such an elevation by Western society could potentially result in atrocities elsewhere being perceived as morally less significant and being denied “the capacity for, or the effectiveness of, transcultural empathy” (Craps and Rothberg 518). The Holocaust’s singled out position runs the risk of estranging a historic event that still has personal and political relevance in the present day, as each member of today’s society lives against the backdrop of the Holocaust. Instead of making it difficult to engage with, it should incorporate a variety of experiences and perspectives, direct and indirect. By taking the Holocaust and the Second World War out of this isolation and placing them in a more comprehensive context, justice is done to the fact that these events were made possible in a reality that is not detached from ours today. Not acknowledging this fact would distort historical truths and situate the Holocaust in

a too comfortable position: While history is far from being non-progressive, its repetitive nature cannot be ignored either.

In current scholarship this new position in favour of a more liberal approach to Holocaust studies is represented, amongst others, by Robert Eaglestone, who points out that the Holocaust is always already there in contemporary discourse and literature. This would render the discussion about whether or not to engage in a comparative project with the Holocaust pointless: if the Holocaust is quasi omnipresent and defines our times and literary styles, i.e. if the Holocaust defines postmodernism in world literature, non-comparative works would obscure its reality. Comparative approaches become obligatory as they lie at the heart of the research subject's nature: history has become global and interconnected. The Second World War was a global event not only for those parties who were involved in the war between 1939 and 1945; its memory has had even wider repercussions, both temporally and spatially, as has been traced by Aleida Assmann for national, political, and institutionalised memory (*politisches Gedächtnis*) ("The Holocaust"). This should also be reflected in the comparative nature of research on literary examples about and after the Holocaust and Second World War. With this thesis I would like to explore the extent to which concepts of trauma and memory as developed in Holocaust studies can be helpful for the analysis of narrative strategies employed in postcolonial texts which deal with another traumatic past, in this case the partition of India. Narratological analysis will show how style can function as a mediating and linking element between postmemorial texts of different backgrounds. In a comparative essay exploring how Holocaust narratives shape African exile/diaspora literature, Eaglestone states that so far trauma writing concepts "have rarely been applied to postcolonial, genocidal or atrocity texts" ("You would not add" 74). He recognises the difficulties that lie in applying knowledge and results deduced from an event that is often regarded as unique in history but also demonstrates that "the pull of the Holocaust is sometimes simply too strong" (73) and that comparisons might prove fertile if one is aware of the conflicting scholarly positions. Rothberg supports this stance as well and has coined the concept 'multidirectional memory', through which looking for what is shared does not end in a competition but opens up a space out of which solidarity can emerge. Rothberg sums this concept up as follows:



the Holocaust does not simply become a universal moral standard that can then be applied to other histories, [...] that those *other histories help produce a sense of the Holocaust's particularity*. At the same time, people impacted by those histories, such as the history of colonialism and decolonization, make claims on a *shared but not necessarily universal* moral and political project. (“Multidirectional Memory” 132, italics in the original)

Another reason for not engaging in a discussion about the ‘uniqueness’ of the Holocaust in more depth lies in showing that the similarities between Holocaust writing and other kinds of literature are not based on the assumption that they describe comparably traumatic incidents, but rather that they make use of common strategies for remembering. This does not fully resolve the tension between a privileged and a relative status of the Holocaust. The Holocaust remains privileged in so far as it has not been repeated elsewhere and that victim narratives are not to be appropriated. The debate on ‘vicarious witnessing’ will be addressed in more detail below. At the same time, however, the Holocaust is also relative in the sense that it is not unprecedented in type but in scale. The Partition of India, on the other hand, brought with it the largest mass migration in history so that this project brings together two historical events that in different ways exceeded the scale which prior examples had defined. The inadequacy of appropriation is then extended to victims of other atrocities so that a hierarchical relationship and entirely privileged status of the Holocaust cannot be maintained: Each historical event has an element of uniqueness which makes the question of what elements of a historical event we actually compare imperative. The tension between a privileged and a relative status lies at the core of this question and forces us to constantly negotiate this balancing act.

Against the backdrop of trauma studies it becomes evident that there are some transculturally similar patterns for coming to terms with a past and that these are not subject to a hierarchical classification of the traumatic event itself. These patterns are mirrored in narrative strategies. A stylistic analysis will therefore be able to deliver insightful results into shared but also culturally specific ways of remembering and working through. How is memory stored? How is it passed on? What is remembered and what is not? How are sympathies controlled by the narrator and writer? How can we know and what can we know? These epistemological questions are all implicitly if not explicitly addressed by works

written in the aftermath of collective traumata as I will show with the help of selected literary examples by European, Indian, and Pakistani authors. I favour the term “transcultural” over “transnational” or “international”, as the transcultural does not define itself through the borders of the nation-state. Astrid Erll furthermore states that “transcultural remembering has a long genealogy” (*Memory in Culture* 65) so that it is applicable to both the global and the historical. I concur with Erll when she defines transcultural memory as “a certain research perspective”, which “transcend[s] the borders of traditional cultural memory studies” and “is based on the insight that memory – individual as well as social – is fundamentally a transcultural phenomenon” (66). However, it also needs to be emphasised that the transcultural is not only a research perspective but also already a distinctive feature of much of the primary literature which is the subject of this study.

The exilic writer does not necessarily have an advantageous position because he or she might be able to maintain an ‘objective distance’; instead the writer points at the gap. He can recognise the insurmountable distance – between the imaginary spatial centre and the lived experience abroad as well as between the traumatic event and how it is (not) communicated. Salman Rushdie highlights the “double perspective”: exilic writers “are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. This stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of ‘whole sight’” (“Imaginary Homelands” 19). “[M]emories, like the refugee body that they inhabit, are fractured, dispersed, multiple, and diverse, foregrounded and invisible” and where displacement has become “a state of being”, Um rightly asks the question: “As the body moves, where, then, does memory live?” (834–35). This particular situation of displacement and exile in memory discourse will be equally relevant for the discussion of memory as represented in texts written by exilic writers in the aftermath of the partition of India. This thesis accordingly focuses on the comparative analysis of narrative strategies in works by Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, and W.G. Sebald. All of these works were written by expatriate writers and actively bring together the Second World War and postcolonialism. The texts thus not only invite a comparative reading, but they also perform a comparative act themselves. Sebald’s text is commonly categorised as a post-Second World War text but also addresses the issues of colonisation and oppression. Desai’s protagonist is Jewish and fled from Berlin to escape persecution during the Second World War. In India he is detained as a German and thus enemy

alien during the war and finds himself confronted with post-Partition chaos afterwards. Ghosh's Indian protagonist remembers London of the Second World War better than his London based friends and relatives although he has only known it through stories and discovers the meaning of distance. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, being a (post-)Partition novel, also refers to other histories outside India, but more importantly fulfils a similar agenda as that of Sebald's work, for example, in that it destabilises notions of truth and ascribes an ontological power to memory through fiction. Before embarking on this comparative project of trauma and postmemorial narratives, both of these terms need to be clarified. After these preliminary, theoretical elaborations, the final section of the introduction will show how the underlying theories are also suitable for this projection of intersections between Second World War discourses and postcolonialism.

#### TRAUMA THEORIES

While these works are generally grouped as 'trauma literatures', the genre is not as clear-cut as it might at first seem. Studies on trauma literature are immediately confronted with the claim that personal and collective traumata must not be equated and questions about whether it is justified to use the same terminology that describes a physical brain injury for a psychological condition. Trauma theories have experienced a peak in the 1990s through major scholars such as Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, and Cathy Caruth. Their notion of trauma was challenged by a second wave of trauma research approximately a decade later, most notably by Ruth Leys's *Trauma: A Genealogy*. Her work is driven by the feeling that in some instances "the concept of trauma has become debased currency" (2). She identifies the tensions in what she labels the mimetic and antimimetic approaches to trauma without trying to settle them with the aim of promoting a "resourceful pragmatism" in the use of trauma concepts (307). Leys, too, observes that the aporia of the unknowable is still unresolved and remains attached to trauma studies; her criticism of Caruth's approach (266–297) therefore shares a number of concerns with my critical reading of Laub's publications especially. Research texts stumble over their own terminology and concepts, as the following example nicely illuminates. Laub uses the image of the "black hole" – drawing on an essay by Nadine Fresco – to describe some major characteristics of trauma:

As a site which marks, and is marked, by a massive trauma I would suggest, then, that the figure of the “concentration” [sic] is, in turn, a black hole. Concentrating at once life and death, the black hole in effect collapses [...]. The impossibility of speaking and, in fact of listening, otherwise than through this silence, otherwise than through this black hole both of knowledge and of words, corresponds to the impossibility of remembering and forgetting, otherwise than through the genocide, otherwise than through this “hole of memory.” (“Bearing Witness” 65)

Laub argues that through the proximity and immediacy of the danger of death, life – as the opposite of death – is present at the same time: it is a black hole where everything can co-exist because time and space do not define this realm. This experience, Laub continues, is impossible to express and impossible to listen to unless one is inside the “black hole of knowledge and words.” Consequently memory can only exist in the event that is at the core of the traumatic experience itself, which can therefore not be grasped in retrospect; it is the black “hole of memory” – something is there and not there at the same time.

The reader is confronted with several paradoxical claims that are symptomatic of trauma research. Trauma theories tend to first ascribe and then deny trauma its unspeakable character out of an almost desperate attempt to understand what they say cannot be understood. Research texts recognise an aporia in traumata, which they then subvert by trying to solve its internal contradiction. Thus, the image of the black hole cannot be an adequate metaphor; it can only illustrate trauma studies’ own aporia so that we are confronted with a meta-aporia.

First difficulties appear with the attempt to find a definition of trauma. Researchers agree that trauma is not a horrible event in the past but a belated experience of something that could not be rationally processed and put into context. The aspect of belatedness (*Nachträglichkeit*) or latency has famously been described, even if not singled out as part of a larger theory, by Sigmund Freud in his works on neuroses and war veterans. The event leading to trauma that is relived by the patient “as something real and contemporary” has to be traced “back to the past” (Freud 152). The event “did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every aspect” (Laub, “Bearing Witness” 69; see also Erikson 184; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 16–18) and it is only in retrospect that the term ‘trauma’ can be applied. However, when Laub goes beyond

this rather descriptive approach to a definition and says that “the traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of ‘normal’ reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time” (“Bearing Witness” 69), a fundamental misunderstanding is disclosed. It is reminiscent of the by now outdated definition of the American Psychiatric Association, which defines trauma as something “outside the range of usual human experience” (Caruth, “Introduction I” 3). But as mentioned above, what characterises the Second World War and the Holocaust is the fact that everything happened precisely in ‘normal reality.’ Dehumanising Nazi perpetrators for example as monsters might make one blind to the causal links that can be traced back as well as for those that point to current but similar developments. Eliminating cause, place, and time would not do justice to the victims and paves the way for voices which deny the repetitive nature of history.

Phrases such as “the silence out of which this testimony spoke” (Laub, “Bearing Witness” 60) and the “boundaries of silence” attesting to a patient’s past (62) reveal the difficulty of accepting a truly unspeakable nature: silence cannot accommodate speech – although it can convey meaning – and boundaries suggest a clear-cut field. This continuously subverts one of the main characteristics of trauma as something that cannot be understood by others. From his conversations with patients, Laub made the experience that he “had to hear it [the hidden voice] first, acknowledge that I spoke its language, identify myself to it” (“Bearing Witness” 64). It seems as if the unspeakable can be both uttered and understood. However, if language can be a shared code for victim and outsider, as Laub claims, it would not have been necessary to describe trauma as unspeakable or not understandable in the first place. A heightened language awareness might help to avoid ambiguities as in the following example when Laub “came to understand not merely her [the patient’s] subjective truth, but the very historicity of the event, in an entirely new dimension” (“Bearing Witness” 62). If Laub wants to stay true to his own definition of trauma, he did not understand the “subjective truth” but the “new dimension.” It is possible to theorise that any trauma experienced by someone else exceeds what we can imagine or understand. With reference to Slavoj Žižek, Grace M. Cho describes this as “history [...] made visible through erasure, one can look to the other’s voice as that which gives body to the gap” (181). As words are not an appropriate means to express the other perspective, every attempt would render a distorted image. Any verbalisation would mean a deviation from the truth

(Fuchs 29) and “conceal the patterns of amnesia and hypermnesia, of dissociation and latency characteristic of the trauma they suffered” (Szentivanyi 353). A communicative ambition is consequently absurd. Eaglestone explains this phenomenon linguistically when he says that there is a “break between language and reference” (*The Holocaust* 17). The reason for the difficulty of (not) representing trauma can be traced back to different language systems and not to the event or belated experience itself: victims and survivors do not speak the same language as those unaffected. Pain can be described in minute detail, just like hunger or thirst. However, it can never be re-experienced by the reader as the reference has changed (*The Holocaust* 18–19). As I will show, this linguistic problem is addressed by many texts both content-wise and on a more abstract level in the works’ style, but eventually never resolved. It is true that a black hole can absorb an indefinite amount of matter; however, Laub’s text, exemplarily for the trauma research situation, ignores the fact that life in a black hole is not possible – after being swallowed by the black hole all existence is dead. It is an attempt to make the impossible possible: to make the unspeakable speakable and understood – to exist in the black hole, which by definition annihilates all existence. While communication amongst members of the same group is possible – that is how the task of finding an “internal thou” (Laub, “Truth and Testimony” 70) can be understood, when the victim is witness and listener at the same time – communication from survivor or victim to an outsider is doomed to fail.

As the question of language and understanding could only be answered negatively, a complete “reconciliation of two worlds – the one that was brutally destroyed and the one that is [...] different” (Laub, “Truth and Testimony” 74) in the form of “re-externalizing the event” through the “process of constructing a narrative, of constructing a history” (Laub, “Bearing Witness” 69) – is ultimately not possible. Claiming that rationalisation and contextualisation in a coherent narrative are possible undermines the existence of the research topic per se, as trauma is defined as what cannot be put into context – a claim discussed by psychiatrists Laurence Kirmayer and Mark Barad as well as Robert Lemelson, using a broad definition of trauma and PTSD:

[A]lthough the symptoms of PTSD may be identifiable across disparate cultures and contexts, the diagnostic construct captures only part of the experience and concerns of sufferers and survivors. This does not mean that

constructs like PTSD have no clinical or scientific utility but rather that they represent only one strand in a complex reality with biological, personal, social, and political dimensions. (4)

It is one example of a claim for a sceptical but nevertheless more inclusive trauma theory. Considering the diversity of the field, research should not shy away from it, even if it runs the risk of lacking completeness and closure. Eaglestone warns as well of a risky aspect in trauma theory, namely that of “overcod[ing] the accounts of the Holocaust with a discourse of healing analysis or therapy” which would ignore “both the epistemological and ethical impossibility of comprehending the survivors’ testimony” (*The Holocaust* 33). Claire Feehily is equally critical. As the aporia surrounding trauma discourse is only unsatisfying to theoretical discourse, literary examples do not long to cure trauma. In fact it is quite the contrary: “representation should seek to reflect in its narrative style the disruptive effect of the trauma – effectively denying the comfort to be found in a narrative line that is able to accommodate the wound” (Feehily 190–91). Nevertheless, if testimony of trauma can neither be grasped nor resolved, attempts can be interpreted as contributing to a larger project in trauma studies: a move away from totality and identification but towards accessibility, integration, and solidarity.

Even though trauma theory seems at times more paradoxical than trauma itself, there is a way out of the black hole into which trauma discourse has manoeuvred itself. A different approach like the one provided by Jenny Edkins might be helpful:

it seems that to be called traumatic [...] an event has to be more than just a situation of utter powerlessness. [...] What we call trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger. (4)

As a researcher in politics, exploring topics of personhood and political community, Edkins comes from a different discipline, but nevertheless succeeds in presenting an overarching and more importantly less descriptive definition that has proven helpful for the analysis of literary texts as well. Trauma can now be described as the shock that is felt when it is realised that safety and protection have only been an illusion. This shock is experienced precisely because the “site of danger” is not outside but within ‘normal reality.’ For some the family or the even the nation will

always stay a safe place; this does not necessarily change when others recognise it as deception. Literature in the form of fictional texts has the ability to reflect this complexity by showing that what becomes apparent in an event's aftermath has already existed before: a society breaks apart into fragments along lines which had already been perforated (Erikson 189).

It is important to underline that trauma theory is not a static concept. It has to be constantly negotiated and adjusted. New experiences should actively be integrated in an ever on-going process of refining, reforming, and redefining of theoretical models. Theories do not hold ultimate truths but originate in a shared understanding of an experience as perceived by many at a certain time (Erll, "Kollektives Gedächtnis" 256). In the context of trauma studies, Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad describe this kind of process as not striving for a "fixed meaning, but [as] a matter of changing social constructions of experience, in the context of particular clinical, cultural, and political ideologies" (4). Tracing the development of the application of trauma terminology, they say that with the nineteenth century, "the metaphor of trauma to psychic wounds" has first been used to describe "forms of violence associated with industrialization." They single out three sets of events which shaped "current views on the ubiquity of trauma": the two world wars, PTSD, and childhood abuse. "Trauma theory has moved on from the surgical metaphors of injury and healing to more precise, domain-specific models based on psychological and physiological processes" while at the same time always describing both individual as well as collective processes (Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad 5). What is common to all developments is the fact that trauma has always raised existential questions: "the laws by which the natural world has always been governed as well as the decencies by which the human world has always been governed are now suspended – or were never active to begin with" (Erikson 194). The next step in this development now should be to extend trauma theory further: a theory does not need to be abandoned altogether because it proved insufficient in a certain area; instead it can be turned from an excluding theory to an inclusive one. This does not result in a subjugation of postcolonial subjects and topics but in a renewal and reformation of trauma theory. Instead of rejecting trauma as inadequate to address postcolonial issues, it should be adjusted so that it can show what it can contribute to other research areas. Considering the many shifts and changes in the past development of trauma theory, this would just be another



one – not invalidating past ideas but renewing them, activating their potential to answer new questions.

#### MEMORY IN TRAUMA DISCOURSE

Trauma studies and memory are inextricably linked – at times to such a degree that the two concepts are sometimes used uncritically and synonymously. The topic deserves further exploration, since the two must not simply be equated; not every traumatic incident is linked to memory (think of a brain injury, for example) and memory can occur in many more contexts than just trauma. Nevertheless, analysis shows that memory is related to trauma in two different ways.

On the one hand, memory is a symptom of trauma, and in its features it is strongly reminiscent of Marcel Proust's *mémoire involontaire*. Memories in this case are not what is consciously retrieved, but what comes up unexpectedly. When these memories take over control, the effect of trauma is that of a “disturbance of memory” (Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad 7). Memories might appear involuntarily and at the same time access to memory is interrupted (Feehily 189); a complete picture of the incident cannot be grasped. This play on memory is typical of a psychological traumatic incident and keeps the trauma alive:

Nicht Auschwitz, “wie es wirklich war” (wie war es?), bestimmt unser Dasein, sondern das, was für uns davon überlebt hat. Und wenn daraus “nachträglich” (im Sinne Freuds) etwas Anderes geworden ist oder doch zumindest etwas Anderes daran angeknüpft worden ist, so bleibt es doch gerade dadurch lebendig, und sei es als Trauma. (Dunker 295)

The person affected is first victim and then, in a second, belated step, unable to control memories or to put them into a meaningful context: “We do not possess memories: memories possess us” (Eaglestone, *The Holocaust* 79). The aspect of belatedness is crucial. Memory as a symptom of trauma only occurs belatedly which is on the one hand due to brain processes, on the other hand explained as a form of self-protection because a society tries not to create or keep up a negative picture of itself:

Traumatische Erfahrungen und Leid und Scham finden nur schwer Einlass ins Gedächtnis, weil diese nicht in ein positives individuelles oder kollektives Selbstbild integriert werden können. [...] Deshalb kann es geschehen, dass eine traumatische Erfahrung erst nachträglich oft Jahrzehnte, ja Jahrhunderte nach dem historischen Ereignis, zu

gesellschaftlicher Anerkennung und symbolischer Artikulation findet. (A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 75)

A. Assmann suggests a time span of fifteen to thirty years until public memory might typically begin (*Der lange Schatten* 28). Memories leave their impact as “disjointed fragments in the memory of the survivor” (Laub, “Bearing Witness” 71) or, as Salman Rushdie describes these, as “remains” with a “greater status, greater resonance” precisely because they are fragments (“Imaginary Homelands” 12). This fragmentation and non-contextualisation then again marks according to Nicolas Pethes a crisis in memory studies: it is not possible to integrate Auschwitz into a coherent historical discourse and therefore cultural memory cannot serve as a frame to accommodate the memory of victimhood during the Holocaust (16). However, equating literature and cultural memory (Pethes 14) – and thus history – reveals an equally uncritical theoretical reflection regarding the equation of memory and trauma. History and memory are distinct from each other, as already Maurice Halbwachs noted in his work on collective memory. What might be considered by some as an outdated theory is nevertheless still able to provide current research with a basic understanding of the nature of memory processes that go beyond the individual. Halbwachs describes history as “unitary” with equal contributions to a whole. Memory on the other hand is shaped by several memories that are not equal as people were not affected equally (Halbwachs 83). So while history – with cultural memory as an institutionalised and archival form between memory and history (A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 55) – and official national and heroic narratives might indeed not be the only appropriate frame for Holocaust memory, other forms of memory such as personal, communicative or collective memory might at least offer a space to keep memory alive, which introduces the second way trauma and memory are connected.

In this second instance of connection between trauma and memory, memory adopts an active role, namely that of a coping strategy. This approach conveys a more functional idea than Proust’s *mémoire (in)volontaire* and if the first connection between trauma and memory resembles Dominick LaCapra’s understanding of working through, the second one corresponds to acting out: a compulsive repetition to relive the past (LaCapra 142). It has an existential dimension, in as much as a society that neglects memory work runs the risk of a

(re-)traumatisation (Szentivanyi 352; see also A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 75). Although memory is usually considered to be individual and isolated, “we often replace our remembrances within a space and time whose demarcations we share with others, or [...] situate them within dates that have meaning only to a group to which we belong” (Halbwachs 54). These might be smaller groups such as the family, but could also be as large as a nation. What is preserved – or contested – as collective memory is not a random collection of thoughts: “What stand in the foreground of group memory are remembrances of events and experiences of concern to the greatest number of members” (Halbwachs 43). Beneath this surface there is a complex net of mechanisms that define groups and their concerns as both are not static, according to Halbwachs’s elaborations, but dynamic. “The collective memory [...] encompasses the individual memories while remaining distinct from them. [...] [A]ny individual remembrances that may penetrate are transformed within a totality” (Halbwachs 51). This contextualisation of one’s memory – note: not of the traumatic event itself – can take a variety of forms, one of which might be visiting places that trigger individual memories and set a starting point for further developments (Pethes 28). It can of course go beyond this example and take myriad forms in each culture. As a cultural act it becomes performative. It is “constantly acted out and embodied in collective practices, material, and otherwise” (Eaglestone, *The Holocaust* 77). Memory is most commonly sustained through verbalisation and reconstruction. Communicative memory is thus of major importance, as it can serve as a bridge between what is culturally archived – for example in films and photographs – and what runs the risk of being forgotten by the individual(s) (Pethes 29). The oral aspect of memory transmission goes as far as what is called “memory talk” or “conversational remembering”, which helps to situate a memory of a past event not only within a contemporary discourse but also to construct (versions of) the past through team work (A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 28).

This aspect will be particularly interesting for a stylistic analysis. That memory is not a mere mimetic reproduction of a past event becomes strikingly clear through the self-reflexivity of texts that do not try to hide their constructed character (Fuchs 122). While memory for Proust is the recollection of the past as it was, Halbwachs speaks of a “framework” into which personal remembrances are woven as “incomplete”, “wavering”, and “reconstructed” elements (68; see also J. Assmann

7). Recent trends in research go one step further and highlight the importance of the situation of the person remembering in so far as time, place, and culture are concerned. Anne Fuchs shows how this trend can actually find its roots in Freud's writings:

Schon Sigmund Freud hatte in seinem klassischen Aufsatz "Über die Deckerinnerung" gezeigt, dass unsere Kindheitserinnerungen die Vergangenheit nicht einfach aufzeichnen oder widerspiegeln, sondern dass sie sie in einer tendenziösen Art konstruieren, die auf gegenwärtige Bedürfnisse antwortet. (21)

This actualisation of the past is described by Christiane Weller as recycling or montage (499), which nicely visualises the mechanisms at work. A. Assmann points out that this construction must not be equated with fiction; it should rather be understood in the sense of "soziale Realität" (*Der lange Schatten* 156). While Marianne Hirsch also perceives repetition, displacing, and recontextualising not as "an instrument of fixity or paralysis or simple retraumatization (as it often is for survivors of trauma), but a *mostly* helpful device of working through a traumatic past" ("Surviving Images" 8–9, italics in the original), other voices do not see any chance for redemption. Looking back on German post-war memory discourse, Ulrike Jureit and Christian Schneider call the transfer of a "religiöses Heilsversprechen in ein säkulares System der Vergangenheitsbewältigung" a severe misunderstanding:

Denn der in Aussicht gestellte Zustand moralischer Entlastung will sich auch nach Jahrzehnten intensiven Bemühens, Bereuens und Gedenkens partout nicht einstellen. Daher befinden wir uns mittlerweile in einer Art rasendem Stillstand, der nicht vergehen *kann*. (11)

With this conclusion they repeat what Richard von Weizsäcker has already stated approximately thirty years before Jureit and Schneider in an address to the *Bundestag* in May 1985 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and of National-Socialist tyranny: "Es geht nicht darum, Vergangenheit zu bewältigen. Das kann man gar nicht. Sie läßt sich ja nicht nachträglich ändern oder ungeschehen machen" (284). Weizsäcker continues with an explanation of why memory work is nevertheless important: "Wer aber vor der Vergangenheit die Augen verschließt, wird blind für die Gegenwart. Wer sich der Unmenschlichkeit nicht erinnern will, der wird wieder anfällig für neue

Ansteckungsgefahren” (284). Despite the criticism it received from both sides of the political spectrum (Fischer and Lorenz 255), Weizsäcker’s speech expresses an understanding of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* beyond its literal meaning of overcoming or mastering the past towards ethical commemoration and engagement more broadly.<sup>1</sup> Different judgements on the attempts of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the previous seventy years, however, do not invalidate the fact that memory is an integral part of posttraumatic strategies.

In the case of the Second World War, Germany’s generation of 1968 would take over their parents’ task of accepting responsibility for what happened. Testimonies by Jewish survivors were written and read (A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 170) so that eventually memory studies reached a peak in the 1990s, a period described by Fuchs as a true flood of memories due to the increasing loss of direct access to first hand witnesses (25). With regard to literature it can be argued that it tries less to remember a past reality than to shape present perceptions, so that social frames that determine individual remembering emerge into the foreground (Erll, “Kollektives Gedächtnis” 260). “Hence [James] Young speaks of ‘side-shadowing’, a conception of historical events that includes the present conditions under which they are being remembered” (Feehily 178). Resulting from the lack of first hand witnesses, other means to access memories have to be found before one is forced to rely exclusively on historical and archival documentation. Literature, just like other written evidence or images, can serve as a trigger for a remembering person to regain access to her past (Erll, “Kollektives Gedächtnis” 258) precisely because it links past and present:

Die entkontextualisierte Erinnerung bedarf des Kontakts zu individuellen Lebensgeschichten, des Bezugs zur eigenen Existenz, der Brücke zur Gegenwart, der konkreten Lebenswelt in Raum und Zeit. Durch solche Rückkoppelungen kann die anonyme und abstrakte Geschichte mit Bedeutung erfüllt werden und ins eigene Gedächtnis eingehen. (A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 248)

If literature, just like many other forms, can serve as a bridge that does not itself represent the past event but connects the recipient to a certain memory group by “reconstitut[ing] that atmosphere about ourselves” (Halbwachs 65), then a crucial

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<sup>1</sup> See also Thorsten Eitz and Georg Stötzel (601–17). For a more recent overview of the development of the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* see Mary Cosgrove (“Reinventing Invented Tradition”).

aspect of this function is the claim that the memories accessed are not solely the preserve of the victims and survivors themselves:

Anders als noch bei Elie Wiesel ist die historische Katastrophe, der Holocaust, nicht das Privileg derer, die sie unmittelbar erlitten haben. Der Argumentationsstrategie des kollektiven Traumas folgend kann jeder Nachfolgende, jeder Zeuge und Zeugeszeuge, seinen Anteil an diesem – nun kollektiven – ‘Gut’ beanspruchen. (Weller 503)

The topics of empathy as opposed to identification as well as appropriation are at the heart of the debates here and the “Anteil” needs to be emphasised. LaCapra highlights the ethical side of “surrogate victimage” when he writes that “[h]istorical trauma is specific” and that “not everyone is subject to it or entitled to the subject position associated with it” (78). He further emphasises this point by linking it to a present and future responsibility in the wake of (historical) trauma – a responsibility which might be neglected if trauma and surrogate victimage result in a distorted self-image and a feeling of privilege (211). Following LaCapra, empathy is more productive and “counteract[s] victimization, including self-victimization” precisely through an affective response to someone else’s trauma and an awareness of subject positions (40). LaCapra sees here the chance for what he calls “necessary identity politics”: “to work over and through initial subject positions in a manner that may enable one to write or say certain things that one would not have been able or inclined to say initially” in contrast to a repetition of untested subject positions (41). The function of empathy as opposed to identification will be explored further in chapter two. LaCapra, too, is interested in the role of literature and art in ‘writing trauma’ and ‘writing about trauma’ (186): art “may provide a more expansive space (in psychoanalytic terms, a *relatively* safe haven) for exploring modalities of responding to trauma, including the role of affect and the tendency to repeat traumatic events” (185). Such an understanding of literature challenges conceptions of memory that see the family in the centre of the transmission of memory. While it might be true that “[t]he role of the family as the institution for memorialising is repeatedly shown to have broken down” (Feehily 185), this does not mean that memory ends here. And while it is equally true that “[t]he role of the second generation as a carrier of memory between the victims and the next generation nevertheless places him in a unique position” (Sicher 173), researchers would do

well to move away from merely biological notions of the term ‘generation’, as Efraim Sicher himself observes:

Generation does not have to be strictly biological. James Berger has proposed that the generational category should be relational to the survivors, measured by the distance from direct transmission of testimony; second-generation writing would then be contemporary with the witnesses [...] and third-generation writing would come after survivors can no longer tell their story themselves [...]. (173)

With reference to Alisa Lebow, Cho describes a similar train of thought as “memory once removed”: narrator and memory do not have to be entirely congruent, as “[o]ne’s mother’s voices could be one’s grandmother’s memories” (180). This leads to the question of the usefulness of the concept of ‘postmemory’ in this context, given that “memory is already communal, passed down, and not necessarily immediate” (Eaglestone, *The Holocaust* 80). Since the establishment of Hirsch’s concept of postmemory in the 1990s, studies on the subject have flourished. Researchers have taken up the task of exploring “the response of the second generation to the trauma of the first” (Hirsch, “Surviving Images” 8), when the parents’ experiences “were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* 5, italics in the original).<sup>2</sup> This definition, however, already raises major questions: What are the consequences for the second generation when their memory is preoccupied with their parents’? Will there be enough space for their own experiences and memories? Why is postmemory necessarily linked to trauma? Or is postmemory simply a term for the *failed* transmission of memory, given that the phenomenon of postmemory is mostly described with scenarios in which there has been silence, with parents and witnesses who did not speak? What are individual and collective as well as national and cultural particularities? These questions have not yet been sufficiently addressed. In the last twenty years, postmemory has become such an all-encompassing term that the question arises as to whether it may have become too broad to be a useful tool for a specific analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> Hirsch seems to have revised her definition of postmemory here presumably in the face of criticism which highlighted the risk of appropriation and over-identification, since members of the second generation as non-witnesses can never have the accurate memory of the eyewitness (see for example Behrendt). In an earlier version of her definition, Hirsch describes the first generation’s experience as “so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own rights” (“Surviving Images” 9).

Nevertheless, Hirsch succeeds in directing the focus of memory studies away from an exclusive view of the victim to the message and especially the recipient. A message demands speaker, content, and an audience; the audience is the younger generation. She suggests that for memory discourse the importance of “familial inheritance” should be replaced by “an intersubjective transgenerational space” so that potentially everyone could be a member of the postmemory group (“Surviving Images” 10). It needs to be added, however, that especially in her earlier explanations of postmemory, Hirsch runs the risk of being trapped in a similar contradiction as Laub (and trauma research more broadly), since she centres her ideas around the traumatic event and the assumption that it can be experienced by outsiders as well: she speaks of “projection”, “identification”, and “adoption” without noticing that she contradicts herself when she describes the traumatic event as “modulated by the unbridgeable distance that separates the participant from the one born after” (“Surviving Images” 10). Strictly speaking, postmemory cannot be “retrospective witnessing” (10), but only retrospective witnessing of remembering. This moment of imprecision, however, has been clarified in *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* from 2012: Hirsch here rejects the ‘post’ of postmemory as merely a reference to “linear temporality or sequential logic”; instead it is to be understood as “both a critical distance and a profound interrelation” with the concept of memory (*The Generation of Postmemory* 5). Similar views on the possible meanings of ‘post’ will come up in the debate about magical realism as a part of postcolonialism and/or postmodernism in chapter four.

A second strength of Hirsch’s concept is that it allows and actively demands for a comparative approach: “I have developed this notion in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but I think it may usefully describe the second-generation memory of other cultural or collective traumatic events or experiences” (Hirsch, “Past Lives” 662). With regard to (post)colonialism, the attempt has even been made to reverse Hirsch’s claim that “[t]his condition of exile from the space of identity, this diasporic experience, is characteristic of postmemory” (Hirsch, “Past Lives” 662), by arguing for postmemory as characteristic of diaspora. Sandra Kim takes postmemory beyond trauma and beyond the domineering topic of the Holocaust when she says that “[t]he passage from postmemory to diaspora happens when an individual’s consciousness coheres to cultures, values, bodies, and places



from the familial past as properties of itself” (350). Postmemory then appears to be almost omnipresent. Although it might be feared that this pervasiveness might limit its power as a theoretical framework for a refined analysis of both memory processes today and literary texts, the questions asked against the backdrop of the theory of postmemory remain topical.

With all these doubts about the appropriateness of terms and concepts, Eaglestone nevertheless remains one of the few Holocaust researchers to end on an optimistic note. A. Assmann’s opinion that redemption is not possible, only accommodation of those “crimes against humanity” in a shared memory of victims and perpetrators, represents a rather neutral position (*Der lange Schatten* 79); Hirsch does not dare to speak of more than “resistance against forgetting” (“Past Lives” 674). It is true that children of survivors live and write “overshadowed by the memory of the Holocaust”, with all kinds of negative feelings. “Yet these texts display growth and change, a coming to terms with the memory. The narrators learn to take on the burden of memory and of tradition in different and more authentic ways” (Eaglestone, *The Holocaust* 96). This certainly challenges Jureit and Schneider’s pessimistic outlook on the tradition of memory after the Second World War. In the postcolonial context, Khatharya Um defends memory as a political act: “What is individual and personal is also collective and national. For these reasons, remembering is, for some, the ultimate form of resistance. It is an escape and a refuge from the corruptive globalizing forces that render ceremonial art into commodities” (843). This position strengthens memory as a powerful and empowering tool, eliminating the colonised person’s dependence. Ghosh, furthermore, understands writing less as political than as “fundamentally ethical”: although some writers might not feel comfortable with the idea of being “moralizers”, Ghosh continues, “that is really what it is. I mean a writer reflects continuously on ethics, on morality, the state of things in the world” (Sankaran 13). Postcolonial fiction, then, can contribute not only a positive outlook but even a progressive one.

Besides these thoughts on the transgenerational aspect of memory, further strands in trauma and memory studies have now developed. One of these tries to locate memory in the digital era. Literature can be part of a communicative memory and in its collective dimension it is far more than only “medial wie institutionell Bestandteil der kulturellen Gedächtnisbildung”, as Pethes argues. If literature can

keep the oral dimension of memory alive, the digital can do this even more so. Books, and especially their digital variations, are not a mere “Verschriftlichung kommunikativer Interaktion” (Pethes 14); a space that allows immediate interaction with another is itself a platform for communicative acts. The second important function of the digital lies in its qualities as an interactive and easily accessible archive. The Bergen Belsen Memorial Centre, for example, has created a virtual 3D reconstruction of the camp in Bergen Belsen in cooperation with the Wiener Library in London and researchers from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona as well as a tablet app using virtual and augmented reality technology for on-site visitors. The European Holocaust Research Infrastructure has the aim of making dispersed sources widely accessible and thus facilitating research and international collaboration through a digital infrastructure. The Transnational Holocaust Memory group, based at the University of Leeds, then brings various Holocaust memory related research interests together such as digital memory and the transnational through strong links between institutions in the UK and South Africa.

As we have seen, another new direction in memory studies is ‘multidirectional memory’, a concept that stands for the “process of detachment, reattachment, and identification” of two culturally different perspectives on the same event (Rothberg, “Multidirectional Memory” 128). As this study will show, these and other recent developments do not invalidate past memory theories; they rather go beyond these concepts, adapting them, not replacing them. Despite the many theoretical developments since Proust and Halbwachs, they still offer a detailed description and analysis of memory processes and can serve as a strong basis for critical work.

#### CONTESTING THE EUROCENTRIC NOTION OF TRAUMA

Trauma is a belated experience of something that cannot be rationally processed and put into context. It haunts its victim even years afterwards and only then can the label trauma be applied. Trauma cannot be experienced other than through exile – a spatial and temporal displacement “from a time, now gone forever” (Fresco 421). Exile, in this context, refers to both a belated experience “in connection with another place” but also “in another time” (Caruth, “Introduction I” 7–8). It is both a physical displacement and a mental one, as the person is denied access to the past. A survivor, for example, cannot ever truly re-experience the events in the past, because the setting has changed and the picture memories produce is always a

distorted one. Even though one might think that memories connect a person to the past, they cannot offer access to what actually happened. From the victims' perspective this silence serves as a fated exile, but also as a home, since it protects them (Laub, "Bearing Witness" 58; see also A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 93–94 on dissociation). An outsider who has not been a victim of trauma might experience a different kind of displacement. The outsider has no immediate access to the shared collective memory of the survivors and therefore finds him- or herself in an estranged position, in an exilic position in relation to the memory of the traumatising event. This notion of movement across borders, of exile and diaspora is one closely related to postcolonial discourse. It therefore allows current research to take a critical position towards the claim that trauma theory as a Western concept is not adequate for the postcolonial subject, as its very core seems to support this link.

As for example Abigail Ward and Irene Visser show, it is argued that the concept of trauma was developed with a Western background and for a Western target group and can consequently not be applied to other cultures. In this regard I agree with Rothberg that not trying to bring trauma theories and postcolonialism together "threatens to reproduce the very Eurocentrism that lies behind those histories" ("Decolonizing Trauma Studies" 227). (De)colonisation and therefore postcolonial narratives demand a historical frame or extra-textual references that position the text in a particular time and place. If trauma lacks "historical particularity" (Visser 272), postcolonialism might be able to fill this gap and to contribute to a reformation of trauma theory. Trauma is gradually being entirely appropriated by Holocaust discourse; it might be worth trying to reframe it in different historical settings to see not only what trauma theory has to offer in this new context, but also what a transfer and application of findings in Holocaust studies can do for postcolonialism. This is a response to what LaCapra identifies as a "cross-disciplinary problem" of trauma studies (204). He would like to see fields such as historiography and literature join forces, since they already "generate mutually provocative questions for one another" (205), and he points at intersecting areas of interest in research on the Holocaust, slavery, and Apartheid, for example. Such a cross-disciplinary approach therefore does not diminish anything that has been stated about the Holocaust and its victims. It rather presents an opportunity to discover strategies that might be suitable for other contexts as well. Moving on from the political to a wider historical frame and finally to non-western and cross-cultural

templates might enable research to get closer to a more accurate understanding of trauma and its effects. Different value systems in different cultures allow for traumatic situations that might have not yet been described by and included in traditional trauma theory, but this should not have the consequence of excluding these experiences. Trauma has rightly been accused of a Eurocentric focus; this criticism shows that scholarship is aware of the importance of acknowledging cultural differences in this field, but has so far strangely shied away from actively attempting to bring trauma theory and postcolonialism together. As Ward writes, “psychology cannot simply be dismissed because of its complicity in colonialism, or its status as a ‘Western’ discourse” (172). The task, in short, is to look for similarities and (cultural) differences between the two concepts without prejudice in favour of either concept or culture. Traumata can differ, and so coping strategies might equally differ. “Acting as a cross-cultural link, trauma may perhaps enable the process of listening and understanding” (Ward 177). Taking local traditions and beliefs into consideration is therefore fundamental for any postcolonial approach to trauma studies that wishes to avoid the Eurocentric trap.

I work with a broad definition of postcolonialism, moving beyond colony and empire. Postcolonial research has developed concepts that in an increasingly globalised world affect more than only coloniser and colonised, and its concepts are anything but clearly defined. If this flexibility is accepted as one of the strengths of literary theories, eventually the quest for a ‘postcolonial narratology’ might as well be one for a ‘trauma narratology’ – they are not too far apart, considering the relatedness of postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, and trauma (see for example Fludernik, “Identity/alterity”). Indeed, trauma theory and postcolonialism show some shared developments in the past. While postcolonial scholars might criticise psychoanalysis in trauma studies for having “import[ed] individualizing and psychologizing models” into a collective experience, Rothberg outlines that in fact postcolonial research does exactly the opposite: it “remains resolutely individualist” in its approach to the literary text (“Decolonizing Trauma Studies” 230). Stef Craps and Gert Buelens further observe that “both trauma and postcolonial narratives follow the same path to understanding through withdrawal, self-absorption, and self-reliance” (9) and draw on Petar Ramadanovic, who tries to link psychoanalysis, trauma and the postcolonial novel. The usefulness of tracing the expression of

trauma in these texts back to the Oedipus complex and narcissism, as Ramadanovic does, remains doubtful.

Nevertheless, postcolonialism is in a position to respond to the demand for a collective approach to trauma studies. While according to Freud collective trauma “undermines and weakens collective cohesions” (Visser 276), one research position (e.g. Visser, LaCapra, Erikson, and Hutcheon) “assumes an unproblematic translation from individual to collective trauma” (Craps and Buelens 4). I agree with Craps and Buelens that “refusing to move from the individual psyche to the social situation is bound to have damaging consequences” (4); they refrain, however, from further outlining these possible consequences. A historical event might have been traumatic for a collective, a group, or even a nation; this demands nevertheless more differentiation. In the case of the Holocaust it is now commonly agreed that both victims and perpetrators could have been traumatised subjects. Primo Levi’s ‘grey zone’ serves as one example. Although LaCapra points out that “these cases were often caused by the Nazi policy of trying to make accomplices of victims”, he appreciates that the grey zone “does not imply the rashly generalized blurring or simple collapse of all distinctions, including that between perpetrator and victim” (79). During and following the partition of India, even more splintering can be observed. What was called ‘India’ while still under British rule not only divided into India, Pakistan, and eventually Bangladesh along political borders but also into many more sub-groups along linguistic, cultural, and religious lines. In the first instance society was not strengthened through the shared experience, but weakened. With frequently shifting positions between perpetrator and victim, it is difficult to speak of a shared or collective experience, although this shifting has always united the different positions. Concepts such as identity versus alterity and the Other in the context of trauma are important when discussing how crumbling frames can also lead to the shattering – instead of strengthening – of shared values both between and within the groups (similarly the notion of hybridity does not signify something that unites but is split). The Other is the traumatic event that will always be foreign to an outsider; it serves to “assert[ ] the alterity of the survivor” (Adams 175). As trauma always occurs belatedly, it triggers society’s – and most particularly the following generations’ – engagement with that past; postmemory can therefore be described as an “absent knowledge” (Adams 51) and, thus, as a hybrid concept. A postcolonial trauma theory is therefore not only characterised by postcolonial

concepts, but – even more than a post-Holocaust understanding of trauma – also by the subversion of these concepts. The manipulation and subversion of these hitherto familiar theoretical frameworks would eventually present us with a postcolonial theory that, through its instability and alienation, is itself ‘traumatised.’

A lot of research has been done on Holocaust fiction, for example major works such as Sicher’s *The Holocaust Novel*, Rothberg’s *Traumatic Realism*, Eaglestone’s *Holocaust and the Postmodern*, works on testimony, works on individual authors, and introductory works and literary companions. Since the early 2000s, a new wave of narratological interest, the so called ‘new narratologies’, has started to investigate, often on a theoretical level, the intersection of narratology and trauma (Finney), narratology and cultural studies more broadly (Nünning), and narratology and postcolonialism (Gymnich; Prince). They all share the assumption that “narrative forms are understood as socially constructed cognitive forces” (Nünning 369). Rather than being a neutral form, these forms “reflect, and influence, the unspoken mental assumptions and cultural issues of a given period” (Nünning 358). Even if hardly anyone speaks of a traumatic style, this is where I would situate this kind of research, as to varying degrees these works use narrative strategies that already include and point at another trauma, be that the Second World War or colonialism.

This thesis explores the intersection of the three theories, namely trauma theory, memory, and postcolonialism. The analysis focuses on expatriate writers, since, as mentioned above and outlined in more detail in the first chapter, the notion of exile is inherent in the definition of trauma, and is therefore not only prevalent in literary works that deal with trauma and memory but most striking in works by authors who are themselves exilic or expatriate writers. For these purposes it is less important to distinguish between exile and diaspora, as both can fulfil the same function, namely pointing at an “irreparable rupture between the subject and its place of origin” (Garloff 3) and thus opening up “a way to new affiliations and critical interventions” (Garloff 7). Thinking of the expatriate writer as someone between two worlds is technically reminiscent of the traumatised person who is unable to negotiate between the two worlds of victims and outsiders. The expatriate writer might easily see herself confronted with claims of appropriation and identification akin to conflicts around identity politics and vicarious witnessing in the context of post-Holocaust writing; Desai’s *Baumgartner’s Bombay* will be just

one example. While even an expatriate writer might find himself in a traumatised position and be confronted with something unspeakable, her distance and identity, “at once plural and partial” (Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands” 15), enable her to engage critically and productively with the traumatic past of their place of origin. In and with their writing they cross boundaries while, following one of LaCapra’s postulates for empathy, recognise and respect the other as other (212–13). Bharati Mukherjee places the expatriate writer today in the tradition of great modernist and postmodernist writers such as Henry James, T.S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, Gabriel García Márquez, or V.S. Naipaul:

their works are encyclopedic, their visions ironic and penetrating, their analyses detached and scrupulous, their styles experimental yet crystalline. If the ultimate goal of literature is to achieve universality and a kind of god-like omniscience, expatriation – the escape from small-mindedness, from niggling irritations – might as well be a contributing factor. (72)

Even if one might disagree with Mukherjee’s view of universality and omniscience being the goal of literature, the expatriate writer can make use of rupture, distance, and partial identity, and is therefore in a privileged position when it comes to highlighting incomplete (hi)stories.

The first chapter will address the topic of distance, which is at the core of postmemory and contemporary literary texts about the Second World War and the partition of India. Following an analysis of temporal and spatial distance, including a discussion of the notions of *Heimat* as well as exile and diaspora and ending on a particularly Indian perspective on belonging, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* will serve as an example to show how distance does not necessarily have to be understood as a deficient concept; instead, it may open up new ways of accessing and connecting to the past – a seemingly paradoxical productivity which is also a characteristic of what Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove labelled ‘memory contests’ (165). The novel brings together Second World War London and Partition Calcutta and draws the reader’s attention to the unspeakability of trauma, i.e. a temporal and linguistic distance, the arbitrariness of borders, and the power of the imagination to overcome a both geographically and culturally isolated view on the past.

Chapters two and three are both concerned with the mutual recontextualisation of themes of the Second World War and the partition of India. When comparing post-Second World War literature and postcolonial texts, it is important to notice

that writers themselves already connect the two in their works (Rothberg, “Decolonizing Trauma Studies” 225). The comparison, in other words, is not merely imposed on the texts by subsequent research. All these texts, written in English, are after all aimed at a Western audience (Eaglestone, “You would not add” 77). Instead of asking *why* references and allusions to the Second World War and the Holocaust have been included by the author, one should rather ask *how* and for what purposes. The authors’ and narrators’ self-reflexive style tries to balance the reading experience on a continuum of distancing and identification (Eaglestone, *The Holocaust* 43). Belgian colonialism features particularly heavily in Sebald’s *Austerlitz* alongside broader postcolonial topics of power and oppression, as chapter two will show. This can be usefully explored through the analysis of time in Sebald’s text, which in its linearity is itself presented as an oppressive force. Sebald achieves both an exposure and a subversion of these mechanisms at work both in form and content. This subversion relies heavily on the active reader, who, similarly to Ghosh’s protagonist, is able to turn a static, historical past into dynamic memory. In the third chapter I will outline how the Holocaust is recontextualised in postcolonial literature by offering a close reading of Anita Desai’s *Baumgartner’s Bombay*. While a lot of the work on the novel so far has concentrated on the protagonist’s Jewish origin, I will explore an intertextual reading of the novel through Desai’s epigraph from T.S. Eliot’s “East Coker.” Desai ultimately wants to portray the human condition of suffering and thus insists on a transcultural approach to memory. In contrast to Eliot, however, Desai does not see any hope for redemption and rather echoes Sebald’s *Fortschrittskritik*. In both cases, looking at postcolonial themes in a Second World War text or at Second World War themes in a postcolonial novel, the intertextual and comparative readings offer new understandings of the text through the active engagement of the reader.

The final chapter, dealing with Sebald’s works and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, argues that the two writers’ styles follow a shared agenda of disclosing truth as subjective, constructed, and multiple. This can again be traced through their conceptualisations, or rather refutations, of time. Sebald’s documentary style is typically associated with post-war writing; through its emphasis on historical fact and the document it seems to leave little space for interpretation. Rushdie’s magical realism is often seen in connection with postcolonial writing more broadly and offers an alternative approach: if something



is inaccessible, then there is no reason for employing only traditional, Western literary styles. With regard to trauma theory, magic realism is particularly interesting because it does not try to resolve its aporia, but accommodates it: the rational and realistic exist side by side with the magical. Although these two modes of writing appear very different at first, they ultimately both address metaphysical questions about common notions of reality and aim at ascribing an ontological power to the individual, memory, and fiction.

Two recurring motifs throughout this work are that of time and optical devices. Time often stands for the oppression which first came to the colony with the Western coloniser, but it also plays a major role in the absurd notions of justice during the Second World War. The introduction of clock-time was supposed to bring progress but instead revealed itself as treacherous. As a consequence, linear time concepts are rejected by all writers, from Eliot to Ghosh and Sebald. They develop, rather, alternative time concepts that are closer to the mechanism of memory. Stylistically this is reflected in a fragmented and often non-chronological order of narration. In addition to various embedded narratives, which almost paradoxically aim at contributing to the deconstruction of narrative authority, this narrative style constitutes what Sebald labelled ‘periscopic’ and Rushdie ‘stereoscopic’ writing. Ghosh and Desai make use of the motif of the mirror or looking glass, which on the one hand and in an explicit way conveys the idea of overcoming distance and on the other hand, implicitly, reflects the text’s own style. The periscope, which might include a telescopic function, allows Sebald’s reader to look around the corner, to see what without the device she would not be able to see, offering multiperspectivity to the reader, who has to actively make use of the periscope. The stereoscope, on the other hand, does not try to magnify an object but to imitate the three dimensions when looking at a two dimensional image. In order to perceive visual depth in everyday life, an object must be viewed from two different angles, which is to say with two eyes or through the movement of the head. The stereoscope is a piece of technology based on the same principle. It does not bring an object closer, but it can depict it more realistically through simultaneously putting things into different perspectives. This three-dimensional effect for an image is precisely what the distance and a transcultural approach to trauma as explored in the following chapter can achieve, both for a text and for memory. Ghosh’s looking glass, Sebald’s periscope and Rushdie’s stereoscope are all means

of looking into the past while not leaving one's actual position in the present. Through glimpses, references, and multiperspectivity these authors offer strategies for further personal engagement with the past – neither in Europe nor in South Asia, but in both places together.

## 1. Distance in Postcolonialism and Memory Studies

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The introductory chapter has already addressed the need to acknowledge the global and contemporary impact of the Holocaust today: on the one hand, the Eurocentric notion of trauma must be overcome in order to make concepts and strategies linked to trauma and memory studies accessible to other contexts as well. The tools and also the language give those affected by other traumatic pasts the chance to work through their traumatic pasts. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that the impact of the Holocaust goes beyond Europe: it still casts its shadow on people's lives today, also on those living in cultures and countries which had not been directly involved in the Second World War. Recognising the enduring topicality of the Holocaust is particularly important now, seventy years after the end of the Second World War, when cultural memory is experiencing a generational shift. The number of first-hand witnesses diminishes so that alternative paths for accessing memories have to be found before we are forced to rely exclusively on historical and archival documentation.

In this chapter I will argue that these new paths are primarily defined by distance, understood in temporal, spatial, and cultural terms. While distance might at first seem a counterintuitive model for coming to terms with the past, the example of exile writing suggests that it already exists in spatial terms. In the words of Salman Rushdie: "If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles" ("Imaginary Homelands" 15). By adding a temporal dimension to Rushdie's geographical definition, I will show that the expatriate writer – defined by his or her *distance* from the ostensible subject-matter, be it imposed or voluntary – can be understood not only as someone who mediates between there and here, but also between past and present. Shameem Black follows a similar train of thought when she defines what she calls 'metamemorial fiction' as a growing genre which "self-consciously meditates on what it means to commemorate violence from a distance" and is concerned with "the intellectual and ethical stakes of memorials created by outsiders" ("Commemoration" 41). She concludes by identifying "two competing directions": the relevance of authority and fraudulence on the one hand and, on the other, the recognition "that passionate concern for the suffering of others is not the sole provenance of those intimately

affected by such suffering” (60). However, Black’s conclusions appear to be passive necessities and are still strongly defined by what Tuomas Huttunen describes as “discursive power politics whereby the narrative version of official historiography takes precedence over personal memories” (para. 18). In line with Huttunen, I will argue against such a hierarchical understanding of expatriate writing, as it is an active engagement with the past which does not enter into a contest with other forms of memory or memory writing. Homi Bhabha is also of the opinion that “[w]hen historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the distortions of memory offer us the image of our solidarity and survival” (152). Rushdie’s exile writer is in a powerful position to recognise the insurmountable distance – between the imaginary spatial centre and the lived experience abroad as well as between the traumatic event and how it is (not) communicated – and to perform this distortion of memory.

This chapter brings together trauma’s latency and postmemory, as often discussed in the context of Holocaust research, with diaspora and exile studies. Exile and diaspora hold a strong position in post-Second World War studies, for example with regard to German intellectuals in exile or the Jewish diaspora. Through colonial history, the concepts have increasing significance for postcolonial studies, too, and again the Jewish diaspora can serve as a starting point for further investigation in this second context. Exile and diaspora as spatial manifestations of temporal belatedness are thus a first point of intersection for post-Holocaust and postcolonial research.

When it comes to the epistemology of the traumatic incident, the expatriate writer does not necessarily have an advantageous position because he or she might be able to maintain an ‘objective distance.’ Nor does the writer try to gloss over the shortcomings of language; instead the writer points at the gap. Rushdie highlights the “double perspective”: exilic writers – in his case the Indian writers outside of India – “are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. This stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of ‘whole sight’” (Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands” 19). With Rushdie’s essay as a starting point I will look at the related categories of temporal and spatial distance before turning to Amitav Ghosh’s novel *The Shadow Lines*, which presents the partition of India, post-Partition riots, and the Second World War as important historical reference points. Here too, the narrator can only report remotely: because he has to narrate

“at second hand” and because relatives he writes about have become “well-known strangers” (SL 280; 3). Ghosh is also an advocate of a ‘double perspective’ which he bases on the ability to express oneself and think in multiple languages. With the help of examples from these theoretical and literary texts, it will be shown that distance can provide a strategy for tackling the traumas of the past.

### 1.1 Temporal Distance

With both the end of the Second World War and the partition of India approximately seventy years in the past, remembering today is shaped by this temporal and generational distance. Some might still have direct access to accounts of first-hand witnesses for example through their parents and grandparents, but the youngest generation in particular has to find new ways of engaging with the past that extend beyond those provided by textbooks and museums. This section will show that such an undertaking does not necessarily come too late. Although the youngest generation was born decades after the historically traumatic event, it is nevertheless affected on a personal and familial level. This personal ambition together with the new approaches offered through temporal distance can turn this generation’s remembrance into a memory project which does not have to enter into a competition with previous generations’ memory, but rather offers yet another perspective: firstly through an analysis of trauma’s latency, secondly through a dynamic and non-biological understanding of the term ‘generation’, and thirdly through an analysis of the types of narratives and fictions produced by writers of each generation.

The temporally distanced perspective is particularly relevant because trauma itself can only be experienced belatedly. Its latency is a mechanism to protect the victim of trauma:

Um das Ereignis überleben zu können, kommt ein psychischer Abwehrmechanismus zur Anwendung, den die Psychiater “Dissoziation” nennen. Damit ist die unbewusste Strategie einer Abspaltung gemeint, durch die das bedrohliche Erlebnis vom Bewusstsein der Person ferngehalten wird. [...] Was in solcher Abspaltung weder erinnert noch vergessen werden kann, wird vom Bewusstsein eingekapselt, was bedeutet, dass es in einen Zustand der Latenz versetzt wird, [...] bis es sich durch eine Sprache der Symptome wieder bemerkbar macht. (A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 93–94)

We can observe this latency with regard to the traumatised individual but also with regard to the collective as observed by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich. According to Aleida Assmann, a public memorial culture usually takes fifteen to thirty years to set in. This timeframe has been observed for example in relation to the naming of schools and streets (*Der lange Schatten* 28). The collective is commonly subdivided into generations in order to identify memory and coping strategies, which emphasises the degree to which temporal distance has already preoccupied scholarship in this area in the past, the most notable example being Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory:

If indeed one of the signs of trauma is its delayed recognition, if trauma is recognizable only through its after-effects, then it is not surprising that it is transmitted across generations. Perhaps it is *only* in the subsequent generations that trauma can be witnessed and worked through, by those who were not there to live it but who received its effects, belatedly, through the narratives, actions and symptoms of the previous generation. ("Surviving Images" 12, italics in the original)

Hirsch highlights the importance of including subsequent generations into the memory discourse, as it is through them that the original trauma of the previous generations is expressed. The younger generation's perspective on the Holocaust or on the partition of India is consequently not inferior because its members were not victims or eyewitnesses but different; it is yet another experience of and reaction to the original trauma.

The nature of these generations has turned out to be dynamic rather than strictly biological. Linda Shortt illustrates how there are now even "generations based on patterns of consumption and social circumstances" such as "Generation Golf" or "Generation Praktikum" (13). The term generation as it is used in this and many other works on memory is thus much closer to, for example, Maurice Halbwachs's memory groups. As has already been observed in the introduction, Efraim Sicher follows James Berger in his proposal that the generations should be defined "by the distance from direct transmission of testimony; second-generation writing would then be contemporary with the witnesses [...] and third-generation writing would come after survivors can no longer tell their story themselves" (173). In a similar way, Hirsch shows how "familial ties [...] facilitate intergenerational identification", which, however, does not have to remain restricted to the biological family or any other predetermined group "that shares an ethnic or national identity

marking: through particular forms of identification, adoption, and projection, it can be more broadly available” (“Surviving Images” 9–10). Hirsch also calls this ‘affiliative postmemory’ (“The Generation of Postmemory” 114). The archive of memory has become accessible to all and is no longer the privilege of survivors and victims (Weller 503). A dynamic understanding of the term generation is a useful way to look at temporal distance in the context of traumatic memory. In the following, the first generation designates the generation of victims, survivors and eyewitnesses. The second generation describes all generations with immediate access to the first generation’s accounts, which might typically include the generation of children and grandchildren. The third generation is the generation which lacks this immediate access; biologically this might be described as the generation of the great-grandchildren.

Looking at the types of narratives produced by the different generations, Anne Fuchs refers to Holocaust diaries and autobiographies as “absoluter Sprechakt”,

der auf der illokutionären Ebene des “ich lege Zeugnis ab” als eine moralische Aufforderung an den Zuhörer ergeht. Diese Aufforderung führt den Auftrag mit sich, die Wahrheit des Zeugnisses in den eigenen Lebenshorizont intellektuell und affektiv aufzunehmen; eine Forderung nach einer anhaltenden Betroffenheit, die durch den Eigennamen des Zeugens erheblich verstärkt wird. (37)

This authority of the eyewitness report is countered by the selective and subjective nature of the account: Khatharya Um explains this aspect of testimony as a flawed and distorted genre with the urge “to ensure well-being of self and families” and “to preserve the wholeness of self and dignity, threatened by guilt, shame, and fear” (838). Thus far her comments on Southeast Asia and its diaspora also hold true for victim and perpetrator narratives after the Second World War and the partition of India. Further observations relate to the refugee and expatriate, who finds herself “[l]inguistically isolated” and is thus denied a wider, inclusive platform: “Marginality, invisibility, and racism deprive refugees of the luxury of contemplation” (Um 838). Alongside testimony’s authority, there are distortions of the narrative for the personal and emotional reasons identified by Um but also on account of “ideological filters and cultural norms of the time of narration” (Sicher 3). Aware of the impossibility of a truly objective account “[s]ome survivors, on the one hand, have written their memoirs in the form of a novel, but, on the other

hand, those who were not *there* have tried to give their work the illusion of authenticity and credibility through documentation” (Sicher 112, italics in the original). This ‘credibilisation’ of the fictional product of the second generation writer started in the 1990s with the realisation of the increasing impossibility of collecting further first-hand witness accounts, which is to say another twenty or more years after the first wave of demands for memorialisation in the late 1960s (Fuchs 25). Partition has not experienced the same chronology of calls for memory. Instead its contemporary narratives have to take on the almost impossible role of filling the first generation’s silence and revealing so-far unspoken histories while remaining within the second generation’s limits of the fictional document or documentary fiction.

As a result, in the second generation we find two main types of narratives: the carriers of (family) memory and the condemners of (parental) silences, often in an attempt to explain the behaviour and deeds of their own relatives. In both cases the family serves as a filter for the second generation’s memory (Leonhard 68). A more optimistic outlook is presented for example in Sicher’s work, where he argues that the second generation novels “may use testimony in the recovery of personal and family history” with the consequence that “much traumatic material that was silenced or repressed is thus worked through in transmission to the third generation” (173; 174). A. Assmann, in contrast, places more emphasis on the fact that because the first generation in Germany still presented itself as victims, trauma and guilt have been deferred onto the children generation. At the same time, this second generation was also willing to listen to the testimony of Jewish victims so that they found themselves in a position between perpetrators and victim (*Der lange Schatten* 170). Although repetition in the form of displacement and the recontextualization of iconic images might appear as “an instrument of fixity or paralysis or simple retraumatization (as it often is for survivors of trauma)”, Hirsch finds that this repetition is “a *mostly* helpful device of working through a traumatic past” (“Surviving Images” 8–9, italics in the original). She thus provides a more productive framework for memory studies.

These second generation narratives are often meta-narratives: alongside the memory of the events, the question of how to convey this memory to the following generations has gained importance (Fuchs 27). The first generation was witness to the Holocaust, the second generation is witness to its aftermath and very much



aware of its position: “They are maimed by history before their birth, yet they come to that history without personal knowledge of it, as ‘vicarious witnesses’” (Sicher 134). Sicher also raises the point that this secondary witnessing, this writing “from outside personal experience”, can make it easier to depict the suffering “only a part of which can be put into words” (32). The section below on *The Shadow Lines* as well as chapter four will demonstrate how language has become inadequate on an even larger scale, putting Sicher’s assumption that the second generation does not experience the lack and inadequacy of language into question. The issue of language and communication is at the forefront of second generation memory concerns: Halbwachs puts orality and everyday communication into the centre of its transmission, although, as Astrid Erll rightly observes, written and literary texts play an important role in the formulation of his theory (“Kollektives Gedächtnis” 254–55). Literary examples, however, often also help to convey the oral notion of memory transmission as will be explored below in chapter four on Rushdie and gossip in *Midnight’s Children*: it is no longer biography which is the text’s focus but the linguistic material itself (Dunker 297) Another stylistic particularity which differentiates second from first generation writing is the role of the subtext, which is used to reflect on the absent and the repressed. Again, texts on Partition, in contrast to those on the Second World War, have to cope with a double task of biography *and* subtext.

The term ‘third generation’ refers to the third biological generation or to the youngest generation without familial ties to Second World War history and narratives. The third biological generation has already been subject to several studies and debates concerned with Holocaust memory. A. Assmann observes a distortion of the role of the grandparents towards the morally good (“moralische Lichtgestalten”, *Der lange Schatten* 180), questioning whether there is a discrepancy between family narratives and what has been learnt for example in history classes. This suggests a high degree of involvement on the personal and familial side for the grandchildren’s memory. Nina Leonhard, on the other hand, concludes from interviews that this generation of the grandchildren understands National Socialism in Germany merely as a distant past with little relevance for the present and their own lives (73–74). This also means that, according to Leonhard, family has very little impact on how much these grandchildren occupy themselves with the topic and how they evaluate it (77). The third generation borrows narrative

strategies from the second generation for shared aims such as the perspectivisation of an historical event, documentary fiction, or the distortion of chronological order (Blasberg 167). This borrowing is less surprising considering the similar situation of the children and grandchildren generation in their torn relationship to the parent/grandparent generation, which – as close(st) relatives – represents both the safe space of home and the (re)traumatising victim or perpetrator. I suggest looking at the biologically second and third generations together and continuing with the third generation, i.e. the generation without personal contact to survivors and eyewitnesses. While there are some concerns which must also be acknowledged, this understanding of generation will largely allow us to view temporal distance as an opportunity.

Cornelia Blasberg summarises these concerns when she says that recent family novels tend to soften current problems in the face of global crises through referring to the terrible German past, “weil offenbar die *Belastung* durch das von der ‘zweiten Generation’ diskursiv festgeschriebene Erbe des Nationalsozialismus im Verhältnis zum Druck der alltäglichen Identitätsarbeit geradezu wie eine *Entlastung* wirkt” (183, italics in the original). A more optimistic outlook tries to focus on the potential of literature or images to keep memory fresh and alive where oral transmission through the eyewitness generation has broken off (Erl, “Kollektives Gedächtnis” 258). The now decontextualised memory needs to be reintegrated with the member of the third generation’s own life story; away from an abstract and anonymous past towards the concrete present (A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 248–49). If initially temporal distance has been defined through the latency of trauma, it is still an important criterion for the third memory generation. None of the generations have been successful in the doomed undertaking of finding any sense of meaning in the atrocities of the Holocaust. The memory of the Holocaust can only be that of a trauma, and indeed it is re-experienced as trauma by each generation albeit in very different forms, as Axel Dunker concludes:

Nicht Auschwitz, “wie es wirklich war” (wie war es?), bestimmt unser Dasein, sondern das, was für uns davon überlebt hat. Und wenn daraus “nachträglich” (im Sinne Freuds) etwas Anderes geworden ist oder doch zumindest etwas Anderes daran angeknüpft worden ist, so bleibt es doch gerade dadurch lebendig, und sei es als Trauma. (295)

Following Abigail Ward, then, postmemory can also be seen as more than the constant retraumatisation of following generations: it can also connect “temporalities and cultures that may enable the process of working through to at least commence” (181). Temporal distance manoeuvres itself out of its impasse. Its representations of traumatic incidents can never hold true to the past. Finding new ways of engaging with the subject is therefore not (only) a makeshift strategy but in fact imperative for third generation memory and the distanced writer. While the authority of the survivor and eyewitness remains undisputed, the death of this first generation prompts writers to test the waters for more creative and fictional ways to achieve two aims: to commemorate the original trauma and to work through their own (postmemory) trauma. Edward W. Said’s understanding of ‘late style’ can be extended from the situation of the author and his late oeuvre to transgenerational memory and traumatic belatedness, as in both cases there is no “accepted notion of age and wisdom” or “spirit of reconciliation and serenity” but rather a “late style that involves a nonharmonious, nonserene tension, and above all, a sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness going *against...*” (*On Late Style* 6; 7, italics in the original). Said looks at Theodor W. Adorno’s essay on Beethoven’s late style in particular; the phrases both Adorno and Said use to describe this style is close to the vocabulary about trauma and memory narratives: Beethoven’s music is dominated by “fragments” and “blank spaces” (9), silence and emptiness, a sense of incompleteness and abandonment (11), “the irreconcilable” (13). The conclusion that Beethoven’s late works “do not fit any scheme, and [...] cannot be reconciled or resolved, since the irresolution and unsynthesized fragmentariness are constitutive” and therefore “catastrophic” reflects in the context of this thesis the necessity of postmemory literature to accommodate rather than to resolve the trauma (12–13). Describing lateness as “self-imposed exile from what is generally acceptable” (16) and exile as the product of “the artist who is fully in command of his medium [but] nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order of which he is part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it” (8), Said already shows how “exile and anachronism” (17), spatial and the temporal distance, must be looked at together.

## 1.2 Spatial Distance

### RUSHDIE'S "IMAGINARY HOMELANDS"

In his 1982 essay "Imaginary Homelands", Rushdie reflects on the situation of the exile writer as well as on his own novel *Midnight's Children* (1981). At the beginning of the essay he describes the situation of "writers in [his] position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates," as "haunted by some sense of loss" (10). Their situation is further characterised by "profound uncertainties" and "physical alienation" (10). There seems to be a certain deficiency with regard to the fictions the exile writer can produce, as they can never describe the "actual cities or villages, but [only] invisible ones, imaginary homelands" (10). In his fiction, Rushdie does not try to overcome or compensate for this lack, but rather attempts to represent precisely this fallible and fragmented memory through the novels' style and through their characters, who are "obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (11). Rushdie's memory texts are three times removed: spatially, temporally and culturally – spatially because his own countries of residence have been the UK and the United States, while his topics mostly concern India and Pakistan, and temporally because the partition of India as a political act took place in 1947. His texts are also culturally removed due to the Western rather than Asian context in which Rushdie has found himself both as an individual and as a writer.

"But there is a paradox here", Rushdie declares. "The broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed" (11). In a highly personal and subjective account, Rushdie identifies the partial nature of memories as what gives them their power and intensity. He speaks of "greater status" and "greater resonance" because "fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities" (12). Rushdie therefore suggests that if this fragmentation and loss is part of everyone's human experience to a smaller or larger degree, then the "writer who is out-of-country" might use this distance as a tool for subjects and accounts "of universal significance and appeal" (12). If it is not expected of the writer to be a sage, "dispensing the wisdom of the centuries", it opens up many possibilities to disclose the "nature of all truths" as "provisional" (12).

In the sections that follow Rushdie then turns to writing as a political act. For Rushdie, “description is in itself a political act”, and he refers to “black and white American[ ]” writers’ different perceptions and depictions of reality (13). “[T]he novel”, says Rushdie, “is one way of denying the official, politicians’ version of truth” (14). It is remarkable that Rushdie draws the parallel to African American writers in the United States, while he himself writes about India and Pakistan. His further examples show how he situates himself and his work in a global environment: Günter Grass, James Joyce and Milan Kundera are three canonical authors who also belong to what he calls “this post-diaspora community.” This is where Rushdie addresses two opposing aspects of cultural distance: “Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools” (15). On the one hand there is the possibility of serving as a bridge between different cultures, but on the other hand there might be a certain feeling of homelessness. It is not Rushdie’s aim to resolve this paradox or aporia. Perhaps the twentieth and also twenty-first century as the era of trauma – on the local as well as on the global level, for the individual as well as for the collective – need a genre that can accommodate contradiction and deny the comfort of meaning and closure. This is something that can already be found in the literary period of Modernism and even more so in Postmodernism and World Literature. This contradiction can be read parallel to David Damrosch’s ‘field of force’ in World Literature, for example. This field is generated from two foci. One focus is represented by the reader and her present concerns, the other focus is the text from another culture or era: “we read in the field of force generated between these two foci” (Damrosch 133). Bruce Robbins highlights World Literature as understood by Damrosch as an ethical project: The reader is asked “to imagine or act out an ethical relation to the world as a whole”, as reading here implies an “estrangement from one’s own nationality [...], but an estrangement that must always remain incomplete” (391). The concept of World Literature thus appears to be able to accommodate the space for contradiction and lack of closure as necessitated by this era of trauma.

Once more Rushdie situates himself and the British Indian writer in the wider context of migration and displacement – he seems almost to declare it a tradition: “We [Indian writers in England] can quite legitimately claim as our ancestors the Huguenots, the Irish, the Jews; [...]. Swift, Conrad, Marx are as much our literary

forebears as Tagore or Ram Mohan Roy” (20). Again Rushdie does not see the literary and the political as separate spheres and stresses that “we are inescapably international writers at a time when the novel has never been a more international form” – his examples here being Robert Louis Stevenson’s impact on Jorge Luis Borges or the influence of Irish literature on Heinrich Böll. We can see how Rushdie not only promotes links between India and Pakistan and Britain, but even extends these relationships by including many more examples, also to German literature. With the examples of the Huguenots, the Irish and Jews, Rushdie selects histories of oppression and extinction, and they seem to be placeholders for many more.

As a literary critic and a writer of fiction, Rushdie raises issues which are echoed by other expatriate writers and scholars, most notably perhaps Bhabha and Edward W. Said, and which are further developed in the following sections. What all of them and most other critics seem to avoid, however, are clear definitions of the different labels for writers outside their own country. The many different names seem to depend on the writers’ relation to the country they live in and the country they might call home: did they leave their homeland voluntarily or involuntarily? Is there the possibility of a return to the homeland? While an exploration of these various notions of expatriation arguably neither unites nor differentiates these concepts, it is nevertheless useful, as it reveals the rupture and underlying trauma of a lost home – real or imaginary. Avoiding terminology which does not have a clear signified, the “expatriate writer” is used in this chapter as a more encompassing and contemporary addition to the more traditional phenomena of exile and diaspora. The analysis of concepts of home, from which the writer is distanced, is followed by the examples of Said and Thomas Mann, who both offer a double perspective on expatriate writing itself as painful and productive at the same time. A further section explores the traditional concepts of exile and diaspora and looks at the usefulness of more recent concepts such as the ‘global’ or ‘cosmopolitan’; a concluding section will then consider the specifically Indian perspective on spatial distance, bringing together Second World War contexts with colonial and postcolonial South Asia in their common experience of spatially distanced writing.

## HOME

If we want to tackle the concepts of exile and diaspora, it is essential to start with the concept of ‘home’: what is it that was or had to be left behind? The *homeland* as a geographical location can be identified through heritage: in the most straightforward sense, it could be someone’s birth place which is also one’s parents’ place of origin. This connection through family heritage becomes clearest when looking at *patria* and its etymological link to *pater* (Latin for “father”). There can also be “bonds of extended kinship networks” (Black, “Cosmopolitanism” 46) which still define a geographical home, but not necessarily biographically. In this case, the importance of narratives increases, as they determine the *patria* and the current location as *ex-patria*, which already hints at the homeland as a construction. The importance of older generations’ narratives mirrors Hirsch’s postmemory: their memories are fully adopted by the younger generation and with these memories the homeland is adopted as well. This geographical understanding of home and homeland has to be complemented by a temporal one. Looking back to the homeland, temporally and spatially, the expatriate might on the one hand see the place of trauma, but on the other hand she might see a nostalgic distortion of it: the place and its potential rather than the place of the traumatic event, with the consequence that the homeland is not only imaginary and constructed but also idealised (Werbner 457). These two views are not mutually exclusive; in fact the latter one might organically emerge from the first one: this idealisation and nostalgia express dissatisfaction with the present condition and a yearning for better times, which is projected onto the homeland. It can hardly disappoint or be proven wrong since it does not have to stand the test of time. Just as the home of the family and the safety of the mother’s womb stand for shelter and security, so the *patria* is often also constructed as a space of safety and harmony. These elaborations cannot manoeuvre around but only repeatedly point at a central problem: to what degree is ‘home’ a lost location of the past, and to what degree is it the projection of a present-day construction onto a place?

These concerns appear to be quintessentially German: the German concept of *Heimat* starts with associations with Romanticism and images of an idyllic nature, untouched by civilisation, as Andreas Schumann shows. However, Schumann also stresses that this relationship between nature and *Heimat* did not actually exist as such during the Romantic period: Poets and writers at the time, such as Adelbert

von Chamisso and Joseph von Eichendorff, and their precursor Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, did not use the word *Heimat* at all. Furthermore, *Naturbeschreibung* refers to an ideal rather than a real place which leads Schumann to the conclusion that the concept of *Heimat* has to be “eine individuelle und affektive Struktur ohne Ortsbezug” (34) and must have developed only after the end of the Romantic period (35). A similar trend has been observed after the Second World War: While the *Heimatfilm* of the 1950s was predominantly shaped by a sense of nostalgia, and a “thirst for easy reconciliation instead of recognition of crimes” (Boa and Palfreyman 11), the late 1960s fought this escapist tendency with “anti-Heimat rhetoric” (12), disclosing the hitherto common understanding of *Heimat* as an unstable one. In this sense, Elizabeth Boa and Rachael Palfreyman label the concept of *Heimat* a conservative one; they argue that it “connot[es] originary or primary factors in identity, or at least it expresses the longing, perhaps illusory, for such an absolute foundation or unchanging essence” (23), echoing Schumann’s conclusion of *Heimat* as individual and affective although it tries to give the impression of being a stable unit. Peter Blickle explains this discrepancy with *Heimat* being an “instrument[ ] of repairing cracks in one’s feeling of identity”, as a “part of an adult regressive strategy for negotiating the dissolution of what is seen in retrospect as a lost, originary unit” (136). How the National Socialists used this instrument to promote their ideology has been explored by Shortt. *Heimat*’s chequered past during National Socialism, *pace* Shortt, makes it a “dangerous floating signifier” which could again “be used to prop up hypernationalism” despite the anti-*Heimat* movement having drawn attention to *Heimat*’s “destructive potential as a claustrophobic form of belonging that is intolerant of difference” (5). While it is important to highlight the risks in concepts that can and have been abused for propaganda purposes, the possibility for reclaiming these concepts and language through understanding that *Heimat* is itself not a National Socialist concept – but that it has been ideologically loaded – should not be ignored. Time, in this context, has a double function: It does not only destroy *Heimat*, “corroding its promise of unchanging idyll”, as Boa and Palfreyman poignantly describe: “time can also be the astringent acid which saves the *Heimat* from its sentimental tendency” (25). This is another point where temporal and spatial distance intersect and, perhaps more importantly, where distance turns out to be more valuable than anticipated.



The example of Mann, which will be explored in the following section, will shed some light onto this question, as we can observe a shift from one concept of home to another within the same experience of expatriation. *Heimat* will thus not present itself as a stable concept; the same will apply to our understanding of exile and diaspora. Boa and Palfreyman illustrate *Heimat* as “Janus-faced” with both “Heimweh and Fernweh”, inclusion and exclusion, belonging and othering (29). This section started with *Heimat* as a German concept and will later in this chapter be complemented with the Indian context of home and belonging. Despite seemingly different starting points – nostalgic longings for stability versus the Bengali traveller – their concerns are shared and the Indian perspective will help to better understand *Heimat* as a construct.

Due to the shifting nature of home, as an identifiable geographical location on the one hand and as a construction on the other, the loss of home can lead to a twofold traumatisation. Expatriation, exile, and diaspora are always linked to loss: either because the homeland had to be left or because one has already been born away from the homeland. If it is then realised that this idealised space of safety is merely an illusion due to its constructed nature, home with all its connotations is lost a second time. Katja Garloff in her work on post-war German-Jewish writers also notes that “[t]he diasporic consciousness now involved a rejection of the home that has turned into a site of genocide” (6). Similar observations are made by Debali Mookerjee-Leonard in the specific context of the partition of India: with the trauma of Partition violence and forced migration, the “cultural representation of the home as ‘safe space’ and the family as unconditionally loving” was contested and women experienced “homelessness within their families” due to their loss of chastity (142). The results of these two works of culturally different contexts evoke Jenny Edkins’s definition of trauma, which she describes as the realisation that a trusted person or group, promising safety and shelter, turns out to be one’s tormentor. The imaginary homeland can now turn against its creator and the expatriate is bereft of her home a second time.

Martin Klebes has summarised this experience in the case of W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz* – a text which will receive our full attention in the following chapter, but that nevertheless deserves to be briefly included here – when the protagonist is on a train through the Rhine Valley: the “loss of *Heimat* amounts more radically to the insight that the feeling attached to that concept has always been an illusory one, and

that *Heimat*, strictly speaking, never existed apart from its ideological construction” (76). The exilic narrator is a prominent feature in Sebald’s works more broadly. His narrator, for example in “Max Aurach”, goes to Manchester, but actually has some sort of experience of the Ghetto Litzmanstadt. The German past could only be accessed because the narrator moved further away from the actual site of trauma. The same is true for Austerlitz, wandering through European cities, finding out about and coming to terms with his past. This wandering, however, is not an act of deferring; it rather provides a platform for working through the past.

Jedenfalls wußte ich auf meiner Fahrt das Rheintal hinab nicht mehr, in welcher Zeit meines Lebens ich jetzt war. Durch den Abendglanz hindurch sah ich das glühende Morgenrot, das sich damals über dem anderen Ufer ausgebreitet und bald den ganzen Himmel durchglüht hatte, und auch wenn ich heute an meine Rheinreisen denke, von denen die zweite kaum weniger schrecklich als die erste gewesen ist, dann geht mir alles in meinem Kopf durcheinander, das, was ich erlebt und das, was ich gesehen habe, die Erinnerungen, die auftauchen und wieder versinken, die fortlaufenden Bilder und die schmerzhaften blinden Stellen, an denen gar nichts mehr ist. (A 322–23)

If time is “the most abstract *Heimat*”, the journey through the Rhine valley with Austerlitz’s “contemplation of the missing traces of time” causes not only spatial disorientation but also a temporal exile (Klebes 87–88). Place and time no longer serve as points of orientation for the present. The narrators gain access to the past through these other places of memory, which makes spatial and temporal distance, be it through exile or diaspora, an imperative condition for coming to terms with the past.

#### TORMENTED BUT PRODUCTIVE: SAID AND MANN

Edward W. Said’s writing on exile is heavily marked by this double trauma and overwhelming negativity. Also taking the geographical location as a starting point, Said states: “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (“Reflections on Exile” 137). In the 1993 Reith Lectures, he further describes exile as “aimless wandering” and the exiled person as a “permanent outcast”, “someone who never felt at home”, and is “always at odds with the environment” (*The Intellectual* 48). This section will firstly look at Said’s understanding of exile and

expatriation, which is itself subject to the duality between negativity and pleasure as well as to the productivity of ‘metaphorical exile.’ Tracing certain traditions of exile, the section will secondly trace Thomas Mann’s experience as a canonical example of exile or expatriate writing.

Said acknowledges that there are a number of terms and labels for the different status of expatriates; interestingly, however, he entirely ignores the diaspora when going through a brief list of definitions. Treating the refugee as a political term of the twentieth century for “large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance”, he defines the exile through his banishment, “living an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider” in “solitude and spirituality.” While the exile is forced to live this miserable life abroad, the expatriate on the other hand has left voluntarily. He admits that “[e]xpatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid proscriptions.” The emigrant, according to Said, is the most ambiguous term and Said’s own definition reveals uncertainty about its categorisation: an emigrant is “anyone who emigrates into a new country. Choice in the matter is certainly a possibility” (“Reflections on Exile” 144). In contrast to Said, I would argue that expatriation is the most ambiguous of the concepts he discusses. Its etymology does not indicate any degree of active engagement, choice, possibility, or wish to return. Expatriation states the fact of being away from the homeland without any further judgement. Emigration, however, clearly denotes active, although admittedly not necessarily voluntary, movement: the emigrant leaves a country, with the notion of going *away* from a place or *out* of a country emphasised through the prefix ‘e-’.

Said ascribes the highest degree of mental suffering to the exile and eventually has to declare to his own surprise that “the intellectual as exile tends to be happy with the idea of unhappiness” (*The Intellectual* 53). His point of reference is Adorno, who in exile started to dislike everything related to the system of his new country of residence and eventually also all systems independent of their location. Said refers to Adorno’s fragment number 18 in *Minima Moralia*, where homes reveal themselves as hostile. Adorno then suggests to turn “the enforced conditions of emigration [into] a wisely-chosen norm” (39). To dispose of property and possession is an enactment of self-distancing, which is how Adorno’s statement that “it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home” is to be understood (39). In

his conclusion of his analysis of Adorno, Said claims that a certain falseness and deception comes with exile: “In other words, there is no real escape, even for the exile who tries to remain suspended, since that state of inbetweenness can itself become a rigid ideological position, a sort of dwelling whose falseness is covered over in time, and to which one can all too easily become accustomed” (*The Intellectual* 58). Said’s negativity turns into a warning here, showing how easily Adorno’s state of dispossession can turn into possession and lead to the very thing that one has been trying to escape.

In this tormented state-of-mind, there are nevertheless certain “pleasures of exile”, “rewards”, or “privileges” (*The Intellectual* 59) and these are indeed very close to Rushdie’s double vision. In “Reflections on Exile”, Said speaks of an “originality of vision”, which he explains with the exile’s awareness of at least two cultures (148). His understanding of the effects of this “plurality of vision” (148) is more clearly explained in his lecture series on the intellectual in exile:

Because the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a *double perspective* that never sees things in isolation. Every scene or situation in the new country necessarily draws on its counterpart in the old country. Intellectually this means that an idea or experience is always counterposed with another, therefore making them both appear *in a sometimes new and unpredictable light*: from that juxtaposition one gets a better, perhaps even more universal idea of how to think, say about a human rights issue in one situation by comparison with another. (*The Intellectual* 60, italics mine)

Said links the “double perspective” to an ethical agenda with the aim of a universal humanism. In doing so, he goes even further than Rushdie.

Said eventually sees the possibility of a metaphorical exile, which he defines as follows:

Even if one is not an actual immigrant or expatriate, it is still possible to think as one, to imagine and investigate in spite of barriers, and always to move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins, where you see things that are usually lost on minds that have never traveled beyond the conventional and the comfortable. (*The Intellectual* 63)

With this definition of metaphorical exile, Said suddenly ignores the distinctions of different kinds of expatriation and emigration that he had so carefully drawn elsewhere. What Rosemary M. George suggests in her study of South Asian Partition fiction and the diaspora might in this case also be applicable to Said’s

metaphorical exile, although a more detailed exploration of the concept of diaspora will only follow below. George argues that

themes that are habitually identified with diasporic aesthetics—the articulation of loss, homesickness, trauma, travel, the longing for return—are not large-scale expressions of the angst of a people who have indeed left their home country en masse in tragic circumstances; rather, such tropes operate on a metaphoric level to articulate the gendered trauma of Partition on individual lives. (136)

Diaspora here appears as a construct which articulates actual trauma, but at the same time hides its individual narratives. For Said, exile is a metaphor of the situation of the outsider which can be experienced by all. For George, the metaphor of diaspora is (ab)used as a platform in place of individual Partition traumas. For both it is accessible by all. It seems justified to question the usefulness of the variety of labels if all expatriates and non-expatriates can experience this metaphorical exile.

As Rudolphus Teeuwen shows, “[b]eing an exile – calling oneself one – is entering (metaphorically) the tradition of Heine and Adorno, Marx and Joyce, all living away from a home that hadn’t always expelled them” (294). The transition to another exilic tradition, to that of Thomas Mann, lies at hand: does this willingly suffering status of the exile not remind us of the artists in Mann’s works, most of all Tonio Kröger, who also had to suffer and remain an outsider, a *bourgeois manqué*, in order to fulfil his role? And does it not in consequence remind us of Mann himself in exile in the United States and his difficult relationship to his home? Is Said’s metaphorical exile another term for the so-called inner emigration during the Second World War? Initially, Mann struggled to see the United States as his new homeland and instead clung to Germany “to which he was linked by his own cultural tradition; and he was convinced that this liaison was stronger in him than in those who ruled in Germany”; At this point he did not see himself as an exile, as is evidenced by the fact that he used to put words such as ‘exile’ and ‘emigration’ into quotation marks in his letters (Koopmann 8).

However, while at the beginning Mann tried to keep his German-ness, he soon had to revise his position, as Helmut Koopmann observes:

although Thomas Mann did not identify Hitler with the Germans as such, he nevertheless saw clearly that the Germans had identified themselves with Hitler and that Hitler had identified himself with Germany. This was reason enough for regarding the fatherland as an alien country. (13)

His link to his home country has been broken due to the omnipresence of the Nazi regime in all spheres of German life and culture and because of Mann's disappointment in the German public who had paved the way for fascism. As Koopmann further observes, this new attitude reached its climax in 1942, when in Germany Mann "now only saw the alien, or more precisely, the evil, the terrible and the eccentric" (16). Koopmann's description of Mann's experience of the familiar, pre-1933 Germany, as alien and the alien, Nazi Germany, as what is now familiar, echoes again Edkins's trauma definition. It also echoes Sigmund Freud's uncanny and its double meaning of *das Heimliche-Heimische*. The experience in exile and the possibility of observing developments in the former home country made Mann doubt whether his home has ever been familiar at all, with the consequence that "not only present-day Germany, but also that of the past appeared to him now as a monstrosity" (Koopmann 16). Writing after his participation in the Resistance and survival of NS camps as a Jewish prisoner, Jean Améry does not grant "Emigrantenschriftsteller deutscher Zunge" such a shift in attitude and claims it for those who shared his own fate, "uns Anonyme": those writers were under the illusion of being the voice of the true Germany which was enslaved by the National Socialist regime (76). While they still had a home, he had never had a home: "Wir aber hatten nicht das Land verloren, sondern mußten erkennen, daß es niemals unser Besitz gewesen war" (83), reflecting also Austerlitz's experience above. Améry realised this fundamental loss only when *Heimat* became *un-heimlich*, "als 1940 die Heimat in Gestalt der deutschen Eroberungstruppen uns nachrückte" (81). Danger and death now come from what was once considered home: it has become a "Feindheimat", which expresses this paradoxical and especially traumatic turn (83) along the lines of Edkins's definition of trauma. Although Mann did not have to fear for his life from his home country, his experience in exile cannot be reduced to a fight "für das in die Fesseln des Nationalsozialismus geschlagene Vaterland", as Améry sweepingly states (76), since Mann eventually recognised that pre-1933 attitudes, and thus Germany itself, have led to the rise of power of the Nazi regime. To a certain degree, Mann also had to experience the "Feindheimat", doubting that he had ever known this country at all.

Now that his former home "had become much more foreign than any conceivable foreign country", Mann viewed his host country more positively and "tried to regard the foreign country as his own" (17). At a Writers' Congress at the

University of California in 1943, Mann said he did not wish to return to Germany after the war: “I am now on the point of becoming an American citizen [...], and my attachment to this country has already progressed so far that it would be contrary to my sense of gratitude to part from it again” (104). Looking at Mann’s *The Beloved Return* and recognising Joseph as partly Mann, partly Roosevelt, Koopmann concludes that “this mixture indicates that the foreign has in fact become his own: [...] not only in a geographical sense” (18). However, it is doubtful, whether integration is really the only successful possibility to cope with exile, as Koopmann suggests at this point in his article. While Said claims that the exile is homeless in the sense that he or she can neither go back to the former home nor “fully arrive, be at home with [the] new home or situation” (*The Intellectual* 53), Koopmann’s article almost makes us believe that Mann did really achieve this replacement of home successfully. It is unclear why Koopmann stops short at this point, but looking beyond 1945, we are able to see that Mann’s new home country in the time of McCarthyism turned against him in trying to reveal him as a sympathiser of Communism. Mann had hoped to become “a citizen of two worlds” (104), describing it as “a historically appropriate position” (104), but looking back it seems Améry’s claims must once more be extended, namely that there cannot be a second home (81).

Thomas Mann is one of the canonical authors with regard to exile writing. Twenty-five years ago, this discipline in literary studies was still developing and it was argued that there was no literary period of exile with a distinct style. Exile writing could merely be literature which depicts the physical and mental situation of life in exile or which aims at a clear political effect (Koepke and Winkler 9). In the meantime, however, we have started to see how there might be a distinct exilic, or expatriate, style. The fact that Mann can serve as a point of reference for the postcolonial expatriate writer supports the idea that there are distinctly distanced modes of writing which are not merely contemporary trends.

#### EXILE OR DIASPORA?

But why can we not stick to the category of exile writing if it has already established itself? This section is concerned with exile and diaspora as two forms of expatriation. The example of the Jewish diaspora further highlights the complexity of labelling, but much more than that it foregrounds the ‘double vision’ and

importance of integrating cultural practice into the debate. The final part of this section will show how more contemporary buzzwords are no more capable of grasping the concepts of expatriation.

Looking at examples of exile such as Mann, or even older examples such as Ovid, it is clear that exile concerns primarily the individual, who has been expelled but can realistically hope to return to the homeland in the future. The homeland is not an imagined one but a real geographical location, linked to a nation. Diaspora, in contrast, is collectively experienced (Fludernik, "The Diasporic Imaginary" xv). Forced distance experienced as a collective is identity-forming. The diasporic individual cannot return to a homeland, in many cases because it has never existed in the first place. The notion of home as a constructed place is thus highly relevant in the context of the diaspora, as the collective builds its identity culturally around a fictive homeland and not around a political nation.

The Jewish community is often considered a prototypical example for a diasporic community. In an article discussing Jewish identity through the Babylonian exile, Gerhard Langer addresses the difficulties of trying to differentiate between diaspora and exile. He votes against a distinction based on voluntary or forced migration, as forced emigration can result in a new homeland and voluntary migration might become less attractive over time so that the experiences can be the same or even reversed, independent of their original motivation (13). Jewish history is shaped by a series of exiles and dispersion, sometimes as punishments, for example in the narratives of Eden, Cain, the Tower of Babel, and the exodus from Egypt. Langer wants to answer the question of why there are also positive images of Egypt before the exodus. He argues not only that the Jewish diasporic history traces the separation from the promised land, but that the resulting dual perspective also needs to be appreciated for its own value (17): "L'exil sert à la purification, il est la force motrice de l'identité juive retrouvée. [...] L'exil n'est pas seulement un châtement, mais le lieu de la conversion, de la connaissance et de la méditation sur l'essentiel" (23). Multiperspectivity or double vision is foregrounded again in the example of the Jewish diaspora which defines itself through a number of exiles. Hirsch also describes "the condition of exile from the space of identity" as "diasporic experience" and eventually as a defining feature of postmemory ("Past Lives" 662). However, the question of how these two terms, exile and diaspora, are at least theoretically differentiated is avoided by Hirsch.



Attempts at such a differentiation are often centred around the issue of voluntariness, as we have seen with Langer above, with Said, who deliberately omits the diasporic condition (“Reflections on Exile” 144), and with Garloff (2). Garloff adds, with reference to Stuart Hall, that diaspora describes a “cultural identity” which “recognizes the insurmountable distance between this imaginary spatial centre and the lived experience of postcolonial migrants” (3), bringing cultural practice into a debate which has often been dominated by the motivation behind expatriation. The example of the Jewish diaspora and Langer’s elaborations show that scholarship did not see the wood for the trees when it came to integrating cultural practice in this discourse on diasporic identities. In 2001, Azade Seyhan already stated that

“[t]he emergent literature of deterritorialized peoples and literary studies beyond the confines of national literature paradigms have as yet have [sic] no name or configuration. [...] Descriptions such as *exilic*, *ethnic*, *migrant*, or *diasporic* cannot do justice to the nuances of writing between histories, geographies, and cultural practices.” (9, italics in the original)

Fifteen years later, we do not seem to have come much further. Instead more terms to describe the deterritorialized status of the author have been added to the list, including global, cosmopolitan, and transnational. Pnina Werbner links the diasporic identity of a “locatedness in place (Israel, Pakistan) to a wider locatedness in world history (of Judaism, of Islam) and contemporary global events” (446). While this perspective acknowledges the relevance of contemporary cultural practice, Teeuwen offers another point of view by stating that “[f]or the exile, globalization is the cruel denial of his suffering, as it erases the divisions (ideological, geographical, polemical) that underwrite his exile” (297). Erik Peeters also argues that “the new global mobility [cannot] be celebrated as an effective means of resistance against the exclusionary hierarchies of belonging as defined by the nation-state” since it is exclusive to the wealthy and privileged (37). Cosmopolitanism does not offer a clearer or less problematic terminology: Black states that “[i]n contemporary scholarship, cosmopolitanism has been used to describe the condition of exiles, refugees and strangers as well as of world travellers, elites and intellectuals” (“Cosmopolitanism” 47). Cosmopolitanism is thus concerned with different forms of migration and living in the world. As the list also shows, however, the world citizen is not at home in the world. Although we

are thus confronted with immense difficulties when trying to define and separate one category of expatriation from the other, it has to be acknowledged that we cannot do without the conceptual variety that they offer. If these Western thoughts<sup>3</sup> on exile and diaspora have reached an impasse, other cultures might offer valuable insights on how to deal with these categorisations. One example follows in the next section with the Indian perspective, returning us to the introductory thoughts cited from Rushdie.

#### THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

In his essay on the contemporary Indian writer and internationalism, Bruce King argues that there are trends towards concepts of “post-nationality” with “globalization as the next stage after the postcolonial” (141); among the authors he lists as truly international writers are Kamila Shamsie and Rushdie. He also observes a certain trauma through the loss of a fixed place to call home which at the same time accounts for a writer’s productivity (146). In contrast to King, however, I insist on the importance both of the place from which someone came, physically or emotionally, and the place someone is going to or finds herself in now. King’s description of the expatriate writer as “Janus-like” then becomes fitting again “because of the ambivalent relation of artists to the societies in which they live” (139) and to the societies to which they look back.

A specifically Indian example highlighting the relevance of origin is the Bengali culture, to which Amitav Ghosh belongs. Urbashi Barat dedicates an article on exile to the question of home and belonging after the partition of Bengal: one important feature which singles out Bengalis from other groups is their inclination to travel (214). Because of this long tradition, there is a linguistic distinction in Bengali between expatriates who left Bengal but remain in relative proximity, and those who moved further away:

there are old-established communities of *probashi* Bengalis, Bengalis who live outside the homeland (Bengal), in most North Indian cities, and *adhibashi*, or diasporic, Bengalis, all over the world, particularly in the West. But the exile of the *probashi* and the *adhibashi* is voluntary, self-imposed, and above all temporary; they have always been able to go back home, no matter how briefly or temporarily. The exiles who had to leave

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<sup>3</sup> I deliberately list Homi Bhabha and Edward W. Said as Western thinkers. Although of Indian and Arab origin, they spent most of their life in the United States and their academic work and thinking is integrated into the US academic system.

home after Partition, however, knew they could never return. (Barat 215, italics in the original)

What changed with Partition, as Barat shows, is the possibility of a return; the two common labels do not apply anymore. But a return to what? “Constantly exposed to travel and migration, the Bengali traditionally distinguishes between where one lives, one’s house, *basha*, and where one belongs to, one’s home, *bari*”, while “the term *desh* is applied to both nation and village home” (Barat 218; 216, italics in the original). Vijay Mishra extends this tradition of migration to the Hindi context and describes the “*ghummakar* tradition” as “contiguous with an older wanderlust” where *desh* also describes the homeland “against which all the other lands are foreign, or *videsh*” (2, italics in the original). He also extends the discussion of home from a linguistic matter to one centred around discourse. Following an anecdote about an encounter starting by being asked “Where are you coming from?” in Hindi, he shows that

the question does not seek a full autobiography but is instead only a means of “locating” the addressee, because in India you are where you come from, and that may also mean the caste to which you belong, the family you married into and the social and economic grouping willing to embrace you. (4)

This observation shows two important aspects of expatriation and home in the Indian context. Firstly, it still plays a role where someone is coming from and where someone is going to; a sphere of egalitarian internationalism consequently does not (yet) exist. Secondly, we see how home and origin is not only a geographical location but that it can also be linked to caste, class, and status, extending the elaborations above on home as a construct. Mishra suggests speaking of an old diaspora versus a new diaspora with regard to Indian NRIs, whose home “is now available in the confines of one’s bedroom in Vancouver, Sacramento or Perth. In short, networking now takes over from the imaginary” (4). And similarly to Said’s exile as a metaphor or the notion of inner emigration, the possibility of an “internal Indian multi-diaspora” – meaning that “diasporas are not only in lands overseas but also within nations” (King 140) – also needs to be added to the list of terms. We can thus see how current technological and global trends encourage research and diaspora studies in both cultural contexts to explore similar paths and concepts. The terminology which comes along with notions of home and expatriation, however,

hints at distinct underlying traditions which are culturally grounded – for example, Black uses the example of cosmopolitanism, which, she argues, “emerge[s] through an embrace of domesticity and kinship” and is “committed to recognizing ‘the world’ through the home” (“Cosmopolitanism” 45). In 1966 Améry asked, “Heimat – ist das nicht ein verblässender Wert, ein noch emotionsbeladener, aber schon sinnlos werdender, aus abgelebten Tagen mitgeschleppter Begriff, der in der modernen Industriegesellschaft keine Realentsprechung mehr hat?” (89). Fifty years later the answer is clearly “no”: the global, the post-national and the cosmopolitan might only be part of an attempt to find comfort from the irretrievable loss of home by pretending not to need one.

### 1.3 Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta in 1956, when the former Indian colony had already been divided into Pakistan and East Pakistan and India. Being born nine years after the partition of India, he was too young to have any personal memory of the country’s violent history. As the son of a diplomat, Ghosh grew up in a feeling of safety and in the belief that the kind of violence that came with Partition could not repeat itself. The creation of a Muslim state did not in fact bring the hoped-for peace as, for example, the case of Bengal shows: divided by a line on the map, it left Hindus on the Muslim side of East Pakistan and Muslims on the Indian side. The resulting violence, which reached its peak in 1947 but had already begun before, was, as David Gilmartin points out, about “‘cleansing’ the local community” (1086) and resulted in the largest mass migration in history. It had a particularly violent character which included the killing of hundred thousands of people, train massacres, rape and the abduction of women. People on both sides of the border were forced to convert or become refugees (Pandey 2). The vision of Pakistan in the 1940s was that of a transition leading to moral order and transcending divisions. The reality in 1947, however, revealed that the state did not integrate diversity but was simply asserting its authority (Gilmartin 1091).

Ghosh experienced Partition belatedly through both temporal and spatial distance: he grew up in several countries, among them East Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iran and India. Later he studied at Delhi University and in Tunisia before completing a PhD in social anthropology at Oxford University in 1982. As writer and visiting professor, he has spent a lot of time in different countries and at

different institutions, ranging from Kerala in 1982 to Harvard in 2004. Even today, when his current home is in New York with his family, he nevertheless spends some time each year in Calcutta (Hawley 1–2). Himself a traveller, Ghosh explores the issue of distance, expatriation, and memory in several novels and essays, highlighting the distinctly Indian ability of adaptation as a consequence of its migration history: “India exported with her population, not a language, as other civilizations have done, but a linguistic process – the process of adaptation to heteroglossia” (“The Diaspora” 75). He differentiates this adaptation from being colonial, meaning “to be imperfectly assimilated into the mother culture” and “to practise a second-hand or simplified – if not simple-minded – version of it” (77). In contrast, Ghosh argues that “[i]t is impossible to be imperfectly Indian. There is no notion comparable to that of the colonial” (77): “This is not merely because India has failed to develop a national culture, It is not a lack; it is in itself the form of Indian culture” (78). The Indian, and even more so the Indian migrant, is thus linked to the multiple, fragmented, and the new rather than presented as clinging to a fixed past and home. Ghosh further argues that there are no links between India and its diaspora: there are no caste or kinship links, no economic connections, and no links through political or strategic thinking. The remaining connection is a cultural one, not one of language or religion. Instead, “the links between India and her diaspora are lived within the imagination. [...] It is because this relationship is so much a relationship of the imagination that the specialists of the imagination – writers – play so important a part within it” (76). Through distance, the place disappears from memory and India is a void, “mapped purely by words” (77).

Language and more precisely multilingualism are key to Ghosh’s understanding of the “double perspective”, in his case the ability to write in both English and Bengali. Interviewed by Chitra Sankaran, Ghosh shows how Bengali is heavily influenced by the English language in its grammatical and stylistic structures, which is why he would call it “faintly ridiculous” to claim that there was “this enormous difference between Indian forms of expression and English forms of expression” (7). He would prefer to look at languages as a “source of strength and richness” and describes bilinguals as “‘universal’ people because we have access to wider modes of experience, modes of thought and modes of culture” through the “interconnection between languages” (7–8). His views thus evoke Rushdie’s explanations on the expatriate writer who can straddle different cultures

as well as Said's ethical agenda of a universal humanism through his views on the "universal people" and "writing [as] fundamentally ethical" rather than political (Sankaran 8).

According to Adorno, "[f]or a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live" and "[i]n his text, the writer sets up house" (*Minima Moralia* 87). This was also the case for Mann, who "withdrew into a circle of writers he knew, an act which in a certain sense was a substitute for the loss of his native country" (Koopmann 6). This escape, however, is immediately and univocally denied by Adorno and Said: "the writer is not allowed to live in his writing" (Adorno, *Minima Moralia* 87, see also Said, *The Intellectual* 58). Language and literature are considered as a means of reconstructing the lost home and coping with the loss of it, but they do not have the power to fully compensate; Ghosh, however, offers a different perspective, by emphasising the ontological power of language in the form of story-telling and the imagination of places. Ghosh also presents diaspora and expatriation not as necessarily deficient concepts in an inferior relationship to Indians in India, but as distinctly Indian. This is personified in *The Shadow Lines*'s narrator and his childhood mentor Tridib, according to whom the "ordinariness of [...] difference" comes about through "a pure, painful and primitive desire, a longing for everything that was not oneself" which can "carr[y] one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places" (SL 36). The novel literally "explores the far-reaching consequences of the Partition of the subcontinent" (Roy 135) by showing how it affects lives farther in the future and in far-away places. These themes will be analysed in more detail below in a first section on the unspeakable past, bringing together temporal and linguistic distance. The second section will then centre on the arbitrariness of divisions and borders linking Partition confusion with concepts of home. Tridib's theory of imagined places will be the focus, finally, of the third section, wherein spatial distance allows the narrator to make use of the distanced perspective in order to overcome fixed binaristic views on the world.

#### THE UNSPEAKABLE PAST

In Ghosh's 1988 novel *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator tells the story of the protagonist Tridib, who is the narrator's first cousin once removed. The novel is set in several places in South Asia – predominantly in Dhaka, Calcutta – as well as in

London and spans a time frame of around fifty years. It gradually reveals the events that led to Tridib's death during riots in Dhaka in 1964. Tridib's death is the traumatic core that the narrator has blocked until a remark by a friend after a lecture sets the research and memory process in motion. We are thus presented again with the temporal distance which comes with the belatedness of trauma. Along the lines of Marcel Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, discussing the lecture and the importance of the war between India and China in 1962 functions as Proust's madeleine and serves as a trigger for the repressed to come back to the surface, and it is only now that the grown-up narrator can deal with the trauma of Tridib's death, which has not been talked about in the family. "As he recounts the events, he recalls snippets of conversations with relatives and friends that suggest that they, too, had been redefined by their experiences that day" (Hawley 65). These are relatives and family friends who were together with Tridib in Dhaka and also those who only experienced the trauma of his death in an implicit and mediated way. This section will trace the narrator's attempts at reconstruction through the examples of May, a family friend from London, and Robi, Tridib's brother, who had both accompanied Tridib and the narrator's grandmother Tha'mma to Dhaka in order to convince an old family relative, Jethamoshai, to come with them to India. This will then feed into a subsection on silence and linguistic distance.

During a research trip to London in 1981, the narrator visits old family friends and relatives who now live there. Among them is May, who was a close friend of Tridib but hesitant to engage in a romantic relationship. May remembers her first meeting with Tridib after a series of letters and his confession of love to her. Her reaction to the narrator's question whether she had loved Tridib reveals a suppressed feeling of guilt:

What do you think I've been asking myself these last seventeen years? [...] I don't know whether everything else that happened was my fault: whether I'd have behaved otherwise if I'd really loved him. What do you think I've been doing ever since, but trying to cope with that guilt? (SL 214–15)

The narrator does not yet have the necessary knowledge of the events to understand May fully. He links the feeling of guilt to May having missed the chance to explore and explain her feelings for Tridib because he died soon after and also because the conversation ends with her recollection of Tridib saying "you're my love, my own, true love, my love-across-the-seas; what do I have to do to keep you with me?" (SL

215). The narrator is not able to establish the causal link, as implied by May, between the rather vague “everything else” and the actual events surrounding Tridib’s death. Knowing the ending of the novel with May’s full account, it is the reader who identifies and fills this discrepancy in knowledge between the two characters: on their way home with Jethamoshai, the car was encircled by a mob in Dhaka. May left the car, wanting to help Jethamoshai and the rickshaw driver defend themselves against the mob. Putting himself in danger, Tridib also left the safety of the car and entered the mob, where he was killed together with the two other men (SL 307).

May’s recollections disclose the compulsive and repetitive nature of the traumatic experience; the moment of trauma is constantly revisited since she has asked herself these same questions again and again over the last seventeen years. Feeling powerless in the face of the trauma, she has been looking for the fault in herself, as her own actions are the only ones on which she could have had an impact. At the same time, she has also tried to find causes beyond her control to relieve herself of some of the guilt – “how could I know when the time was so short and there were so many questions? I was so young; I didn’t know what was happening to me” (SL 215) – explaining the double failure of her passivity in the romantic relationship and her actions of leaving the car in light of her youthful inexperience. This behaviour indicates that May has not come to terms with Tridib’s death. When saying goodbye to the narrator, she wonders why she had told him “all this” – “I’ve never told anyone else ever before” (SL 215). She still remains vague about what “all this” actually means and the narrator must still think that it is more concerned with her relationship to Tridib rather than the circumstances of his death. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that this topic has been a taboo in her life so far. By breaking this pattern of silence, not only the narrator but also May herself make the first steps towards a recovery of the past and of themselves.

Another traumatised character is Robi, who is only slightly younger than the narrator. He was in the car, too, after they had picked up Jethamoshai and when the mob attacked. The scene, which triggers the suppressed memory into coming back to the surface, takes place in a restaurant when the waiter, after having engaged in a conversation about Dhaka, asks him how it is possible that he remembers the place so well if he left it such a long time ago. Answering that he could remember it so well because his brother was killed there, he is visibly upset and rushes out of the



restaurant. Outside, Robi confesses to his sister Ila and the narrator that he keeps having the same dream about the day of Tridib's death. The recurring dream emphasises again the belated, compulsive, and repetitive nature of trauma: Robi gets it "about twice a year now, but it used to be once a week" and he "learnt to control it" (SL 298). In his dream, the car is attacked by a crowd whose faces he now knows "better than I know my friends" (SL 298); the *Un-heimliche* has become the familiar over time. In an empty street with all shops and windows closed, the crowd of men first attacks the car, then, after a shot by the security man, they turn to the rickshaw.

With the account of his dream, the narrative continues where the narrator stopped thirty pages prior, where the journey to Jethamoshai is told by the narrator, but largely perspectivised through Robi: because of the nervous driver and security guard, "Robi had expected to see a crowd waiting for them, but the road was empty, deserted, and all the shops were shut" (SL 266). He misinterprets the empty street as safety due to the absence of potential attackers. This misjudgement haunts Robi in his dream where the scene very abruptly changes from lively streets to closed shops and windows and the mob. In the early account of the incident, Robi saw the mob first, "immediately after they turned the first corner, [...] where the boys used to play football on a patch of grass" (SL 267). A place the children used to associate with play and peace has been desecrated in the dream and has become a "muddy kind of field", "very small" and with "a crooked goalpost stuck in the mud" (SL 298).

For the middle section of Robi's dream, there is no other account in the novel to which it could be compared. The reader does not know if a shot has really been fired. It is synchronous again with May's final account, when Robi dreams of May getting out of the car: "she's tiny, shrunken, and behind her is that rickshaw, reaching heavenwards, like a gigantic anthill, and its sides are seething with hundreds of little men" (SL 301). The distorted proportions highlight firstly the fact that Robi originally experienced everything as a young boy and secondly that May had no chance to stand up against the mob. May's words – "Those two are going to be killed because of you – you're cowards, murderers, to abandon them here like this" (SL 301) – are not confirmed by May's version of what happened; they might rather represent Robi's own guilty conscience. Robi's action of trying to pull Tridib back into the car and his shouting are futile: "his hand won't reach him" and he has

“no voice left”, he “cannot make a single sound” (SL 301). Again there is the attempt at action and the search for external reasons for their inability to alleviate the pressure of the (self-imposed) guilt. The dream always stops at the point when Tridib leaves the car. His death, the actual traumatic core, has not yet been coped with and worked through.

The novel thus presents the recontextualisation of different family narratives which encircle the traumatic core. In particular, it is the many moments of silence that the narrator remembers now and tries to explain. Recounting his own experience of the Calcutta riots of 1964, which he can later link to the riots in Dhaka which account for Tridib’s death, he remembers how a mob got close to his school building. Since the windows were painted green against the sun, the pupils could only hear successions of shouting and silence which got closer. While the safe places of the school and the bus, which had arrived to bring the pupils home early, are dominated by silence, the danger and violence of the mob increase in loudness. Realising that “our city had turned against us” (SL 249), one of the boys started crying, while the rest of the pupils remained silent: “At any other time we would have laughed, but now we listened to him in silence, appalled. [...] He cried like that all the way home, for all of us” (SL 250). This traumatic event brings us back to Jenny Edkins’s definition of trauma: the streets of the children’s homes have turned against them and “the war [is] between oneself and one’s image in the mirror” (SL 250). The narrator compares this existential rupture to earthquake victims “who have lost faith in the stillness of the earth” (SL 250). This stillness can easily be interpreted literally and metonymically, referring to the narrator’s own situation in Calcutta, threatened by the mob. The metaphor of the earthquake for the Holocaust is also used by Jean-François Lyotard:

Suppose that an earthquake destroys not only lives, buildings, and objects but also the instruments used to measure earthquakes directly and indirectly. The impossibility of quantitatively measuring it does not prohibit, but rather inspires in the minds of the survivors the idea of a very great seismic force. (56)

The Holocaust as natural disaster is a dangerous metaphor, since its connotations of inevitability distort the responsibility and culpability of the perpetrators. Nevertheless it works from the victims’ perspective and especially the consequences of the metaphorical earthquake are a useful comparison which echoes

a lot of points made in Ghosh's novel. The fact that also the instruments to measure the destruction are destroyed leads to the problem of language and "indicate that something which should be able to be put into phrases cannot be phrased in the accepted idioms" (Lyotard 56–57). Ghosh's narrator continues with further descriptions and comparisons, trying to convey the "complex feeling, the one aroused by the negative presentation of the indeterminate" (Lyotard 56), only to admit that such an extraordinary experience remains indescribable. However, because he cannot forget either, he has to continue writing regardless.

Silence has furthermore been imposed on the narrator by his parents, who failed to tell him the truth about Tridib's death right after it had happened. He was told that Tridib had died in an accident, caused by "hooligans", "ordinary ruffians like you have everywhere" and that the "car swerved and crashed into a wall or something" (SL 293). They make their son promise not to tell anyone about the accident because Tridib's father holds an important office in the government (SL 293). It is only one and a half years later that the crucial information accidentally escapes his mother when Tha'mma, the narrator's grandmother, is brought to a mental institution. She wants to donate all her jewellery and even blood to the war between India and Pakistan, saying it was for the boy's sake and for his freedom: "to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out" (SL 291). The young narrator's reaction is to scream: "I screamed from the pit of my stomach, holding my head and shutting my eyes. I screamed until my mother and the servants came and carried me to my room, and even then I screamed and would not open my eyes" (SL 291). His mother tries to explain Tha'mma's behaviour by saying that "[s]he's never been the same [...] since they killed Tridib over there" (SL 292). The boy complains that he has been told that it was an accident and his mother tries to cover up her mistake of saying the truth before a tranquilliser puts the boy to sleep. One and a half years after Tridib's death, it crossed the narrator's mind for the first time that it might have been something other than an accident; it is only at the time of narration in the 1980s and after the visit to London that he can piece together the previously unspoken family narratives.

May had never spoken to anyone about herself and Tridib until the narrator's visit, and Robi's dream is full of silences: when the mob moves towards the car, Robi "can't hear a single thing, no sound at all" until the attack (SL 299). Another round of silence is broken when he hears a creak from behind; it is the rickshaw and

“in the quiet it sounds like a thunderclap” (SL 300). At this point the violence moves away from the car towards the rickshaw. In these two instances, the rupture of silence marks the target for the attack. A final example from Robi’s dream also seems to follow this pattern, albeit with a different outcome: Robi tries to shout after Tridib, who also leaves the car, but he “cannot make a single sound” (SL 301). Because he cannot make a sound, the violence remains focused on the rickshaw. The inability to shout represents his inability to react against the violence. At the same time, the silence is also symptomatic of trauma as the unspeakable, of an experience that exceeds what can be comprehended.

The temporal distance is thus accompanied by a linguistic one. Although the narrator first has doubts about the story of Tridib’s accident as early as 1965, it is only fourteen years later, in 1979, that he can make sense of it, starting with his research on the 1964 riots. He initially blames his father for allowing the journey to Dhaka since he could have known there would be trouble. However, carefully examining the newspaper articles and

looking at the paper that my father had read that morning, I knew he could not be blamed for ignoring the stirrings of the silence around him: in that paper there was not the slightest hint or augury of the coming carnage; [...] how could I blame him? He was merely another victim of that seamless silence. (SL 279)

Silence here has the role of the perpetrator and, as María Elena Martos Hueso shows, of an enemy to the Indian identity of heteroglossia (196). If there had been better coverage and consequently no silence, his father would not have let Tha’mmar and the others go and the bloodshed could have been avoided. However, so many parties were involved in creating this silence that its guilt remains abstract. If everyone is guilty, the individual finds a way to pretend innocence; this is something that the narrator recognises: “And yet he *knew*, and *they* must have known too, all the canny journalists; everybody must have known in some voiceless part of themselves” (SL 279, italics in the original), extending the group of accomplices from his father, to the journalists, to everyone.

The motif of silence reflects Ghosh’s own ambition as a writer of uncovering hitherto ignored violent pasts. At the same time, the author is aware of the inherent paradox that this entails, as he explains in an interview:

I'm glad to say *that* silence [as in *The Shadow Lines*] no longer exists. I mean now when you have a riot there's a huge media discourse about it, which is exactly as it should be. But if you look back on Indian history, [...] there are so many sorts of events which are just constantly, as it were, wrapped in silence. [...] especially as a writer, you know, you're in the business of producing words and there's a kind of paradox when you're addressing something which is explicitly silent, I think. (Sankaran 12, italics in the original)

Ghosh sees that, in the age of social media and increasing digital technology, silences such as those in *The Shadow Lines* (1988) will no longer exist. While some events are silenced, he also acknowledges the silent, or unspeakable, nature of the traumatic event and the inadequacy of language. In *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator has a similar realisation: when he looks at the newspapers of 1964 more closely, he realises that language is simply not able to grasp and describe the traumatic core:

But for these other things we can only use words of description when they happen and then fall silent, for to look for words of any other kind would be to give them meaning, and that is a risk we cannot take any more than we can afford to listen to madness.

So that is why I can only describe at second hand the manner of Tridib's death: I do not have the words to give it meaning. *I do not have the words*, and I do not have the strength to listen. (SL 280, italics in the original)

The discourse of silence, the unspeakable, futile attempt at giving meaning to something that resists meaning – but also the importance, and, here, the impossibility of listening: all of this is familiar from trauma and memory studies in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Ghosh also recognises that this language barrier in the context of trauma is one that cannot be overcome: “Every word I write about those events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with silence. It is a struggle I am destined to lose – have already lost” (SL 167). Trying to define the silence, the narrator is defeated again and he can only understand the silence as what it is not. Silence “is a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words” (SL 267). And this silence cannot be fought through speech, because words would imply that there is meaning – which in fact there is not: we would only “lose ourselves in the silence that lies in the gap between words and the world”, in the “silence of an absolute, impenetrable banality” (SL 267–68). Bhabha draws similar conclusions with his concept of ‘un-speaking’, which “is both to release from erasure and repression, and to reconstruct, reinscribe the element of the unknown” (146). Ghosh further

explains these thoughts on the meaninglessness and banality of language in his interview with Sankaran: with language generally but especially with English as the language of a former empire, there is historically “a constant tendency to whitewash the past” with the consequence that one does not speak of the occupation or brutalisation of Burma, for example, but of “pacification”; “peace making” is used in the context of the war on Iraq rather than “war of aggression” (4). Ghosh and the narrator recognise the inadequacy of language and that the only possibility to narrate trauma is to do so “at second hand”, as through the accounts of May and Robi: using a style of mediated reports, the narrator keeps his distance in order not to appropriate the perspective of the witness, which explains why Pericles Lewis puts Ghosh into the tradition of early modernists, who “are aware of their distance from any God’s-eye-view or indeed any form of objective knowledge that would be untainted by the cultural specificity” such as James Joyce or Proust (211). Lewis’s “cultural specificity” is also accounted for by temporal and spatial distance. This temporal distance, which also feeds into a stylistic distance, helps to accommodate rather than mute the trauma. The crying child in the school bus during the Calcutta riots (SL 250) as well as the narrator’s screaming in reaction to his mad grandmother as analysed above (SL 291) can now be understood as the only meaningful utterance possible in the face of trauma.

#### PARTITIONED HOMES

The importance of home for the expatriate, be it as a geographical location, heritage, or pure construction, has been highlighted above. In *The Shadow Lines*, characters’ notions of home are at odds due to the partition of the subcontinent and their own history of migration. This section will reveal the deconstruction of an understanding of the border as barrier by looking at Tha’mma’s confusion about going and coming home before following her memories to her childhood home of Dhaka, which serves as a microcosm for (pre)Partition India. The final part of this section will be concerned with the arbitrariness of borders, which, however, does not question the usefulness of the nation-state, according to Ghosh.

Although the two chapters of the novel seem to suggest a clear order of first “Going Away” and eventually “Coming Home”, it is precisely the arbitrariness of language in the face of a traumatic uprootedness which the two titles eventually express. They are played with in a passage in which Tha’mma seemingly confuses

the words 'coming' and 'going' when, living in Calcutta, she says that in earlier times "I could come home to Dhaka whenever I wanted" (SL 187). Only later the narrator realises that this linguistic problem was not his grandmother's fault: "it lay in language. Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to" (SL 188). The loss of this centrality brings us back to the spatial core of the trauma which the expatriate experiences.

Planning the trip to Dhaka, Tha'mma enquires about the border and whether she would be able to see it from the plane with trenches and "guns pointing at each other" (SL 185). Believing in the meaningfulness of Partition and the Indian state, she expects difference firstly geographically on both sides of the border and secondly diachronically in comparison to the pre-partition country. When her son explains that the main issue is about correctly filling in the necessary forms, which ask for nationality and place of birth, she hesitates, as she is not quite able "to understand how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality" (SL 187). Tha'mma is confronted with the instability of the concept of home and starts to realise that her (former) home of Dhaka has not changed with her to India, but is now in Pakistan, which she, with her strong nationalist views, sees as the land of the enemy: for the first time she senses the reality of conflicting notions of home. Speaking with Bhabha's words, "the border between home and world becomes confused; and uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (141). His words synthesise Said's uncomfortable position as an exile and Tha'mma's confusion about ideology and heritage. "[I]deological conviction" and her birthplace, which Peeters lists as the two "plank[s] underpinning her belonging", are in contradiction, a contradiction that is symptomatic for a lot of forced migration during and after Partition when people had

to feel the trauma of having been forced to leave their physical homes to move to the cultural home of their nation. Yet, that this move was traumatic can never be acknowledged, not even by the people involved. All that happened to them, after all, is that they were made to move to the nation-state in which they belong, where they should feel at home. They have become, impossibly, refugees in their own country. (Peeters 32)

Tha'mma's belief in the primarily "abstract construction of nationhood and the Indian nation-state" is contrasted by her uncle's refusal to leave his house in Dhaka

(Sengupta 507). His sense of belonging is linked to a place independent of nationhood: “I don’t believe in this India-Shindia. It’s all very well, you’re going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? [...] As for me, I was born here, and I’ll die here” (SL 264).

For some, such as the narrator, the “act of border crossing signifies a widening of their horizons, yet for others it ends in a loss of identity” (Dengel-Janic 73). Tha’mma’s linguistic mistake of “com[ing] home to Dhaka”, then, can be understood as a Freudian slip which shows that at least subconsciously she still perceives Dhaka as her home. In describing Tha’mma’s hope for a clearly visible border, Ghosh reveals her yearning for stability and belonging. In fact, however, “national frontiers [only] create a false sense of distance and reality”, merely “generat[ing] the illusion of differences”, as Nadia Butt points out (9). It is too restrictive to limit the meaning of the novel’s chapter titles to “the main themes of home and exile, of belonging and alienation”, as Ellen Dengel-Janic, for example, suggests (74): they rather disclose the arbitrariness of language and with that of the idea of dividing borders.

However, the partition of homes started much earlier in Tha’mma’s life with her parental house in Dhaka functioning as a microcosm for (pre-)Partition India. Being once more inspired by Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, Ghosh suggests in his correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty “that writing about families is one way of not writing about the nation (or other restrictively imagined collectives)” (Ghosh and Chakrabarty 147): India’s diversity is reflected in the “many branches of the family”, with the consequence “that even the most knowledgeable amongst them had become a little confused about their relationships” (SL 148). The death of Tha’mma’s grandfather, an intimidating and at times violent force who used to hold the different family branches together, then mirrors the pull-out of the British coloniser from India. The ensuing quarrels in the household reflect the debates about the organisation of postcolonial India: Jethamoshai unsuccessfully tries to imitate his father’s role, while his wife and Tha’mma’s mother “began to suspect each other of favouring their own children above the rest” until the two husbands start antagonising as well (SL 150). As lawyers, they would “send each other notes on legal stationary” (SL 150), deciding from their desk what is best for the family and the house. The children reveal the arbitrariness of the whole matter since they



are still playing together. They are not (yet) actively involved in family politics: although the cousins have to play in secret now, they only hide so that their parents do not see them together and not for a political reason. The physical division of the house is mapped by a wooden wall, which, mirroring the drawing of the Indian and Pakistani border, has been drawn with “lawyer-like precision”: it “ploughed right through a couple of doorways”, “went through a lavatory” and “bisect[ed] an old commode” (SL 151). And here too, the hoped-for peace does not settle in; instead there is “a strange, eerie silence”, further nurturing the bitterness (SL 151). Time does not solve this feeling of bitterness either, so that none of the families dares “to venture out into the limbo of reconciliation. They liked the wall now; it had become a part of them” (SL 153).

Younger generations do not remember how the Partition came about and, because of the families’ silence, they had to invent this past themselves. This is echoed in *The Shadow Lines* in the “upside-down house” (SL 154): Tha’mma would make up stories for her younger sister about the other side of the house such as that they sleep under their beds, write with umbrellas and drink tea from buckets (SL 154). Tha’mma admits, however, that “as we grew older even I almost came to believe in our story” (SL 155), showing how stories and reconstructions of the other side of the house or border can develop a life of their own and eventually acquire the status of truth if they are not challenged and negotiated through other narratives. The partitioned house in Dhaka presents a traumatic rupture in three instances: firstly as a familial rupture, where the home of the family is no longer protective. The second and third ruptures are spatial in nature: the division of the house together with the loss of access to memories of it on the one hand; on the other hand, the loss of this partitioned home as a consequence of the partition of India and moving to Calcutta.

Tha’mma’s position is also reminiscent of Said’s exile: she is torn between the nostalgia of the lost home on the one side and the bitterness and Calcutta on the other. Similarly to the late figures of Adorno and Beethoven, she “abandons communication with the established order of which [s]he [was] part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it”, creating “a form of exile” (Said, *On Late Style* 8). Although she does not stay in touch with the Dhaka family after Partition, she “would *often* think back on Dhaka”, summarising “the old house, her parents, Jethamoshai, her childhood” as “the *best* parts” of her life, which are

already over (SL 154, italics mine). She thus also experiences an “unhealable rift” and feels “always at odds with the environment” (Said, “Reflections on Exile” 137). But although she feels so nostalgic towards her former home, she develops strong nationalistic attitudes which reject it. Her shifting attitude then evokes Mann’s changing positions towards both his homeland and his host country. In its inconsistent, disrupting, and extreme nature, it also evokes Said’s notion of late style, in which extremes “no longer allow for any secure middle ground of harmony or spontaneity” but rather reminds the individual of “the wholeness [...] that has eluded it forever” (*On Late Style* 10; Rose Subotnik in Said 11). Tha’mma fulfils a similar function as Adorno in Said’s essay, who both analyses and embodies late style: Tha’mma comments on a belatedness and lateness which she – unconsciously – performs herself.

The partitioned house as a reflection of the partition of India is taken to extremes when Tha’mma visits the house to bring her uncle to Calcutta: he now has to share his house with a Muslim refugee family. While this is perceived as an intrusion by Tha’mma, it is also a repetition of the cousins playing together in secret, highlighting the arbitrariness of such divisions. These divisions on the micro-level are taken again to macro-level later in the novel, when a concluding passage from *The Shadow Lines* demonstrates how distance and borders are not given, but constructed: after the narrator has drawn the circles on the map, he starts thinking about all these cartographical lines representing the countries’ borders:

What had they felt [...] when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet-undiscovered irony – the irony that killed Tridib: the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the 4000-year-old history of that map when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines – so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free – our looking glass border. (SL 286)

Rituparna Roy shows how the line as the arbitrarily drawn border is a common motif in post-Partition novels. In early literary examples, however, “there is no questioning of the *concept* of the border as such (136, italics in the original). Confusion about belonging and home together with violence might be presented and condemned; the meaningfulness of the border itself, however, is not. *The*

*Shadow Lines*, then, is one of the first novels to put the concept of the border and dividing line into question, as in reality “they defeat and negate the very reason behind their ostensible existence” (Roy 136). This does not imply that Ghosh advocates the idea of a post-nation. In conversation with T. Vijay Kumar he acknowledges the complexity of the issue when asked about the consequences that result from the arbitrariness of lines and the relevance of the nation. Although “the classical, nineteenth-century ideology of the nation has essentially been eroded”, both in the West and in the East, “the nation state is very important because the people who discount the importance of the nation state haven’t actually seen the alternative. Because the alternative for us, for a Third World country like ours, is not the EU; the alternative for us will be warlords” (102). This echoes Améry’s point of view, who says “daß ein kultureller Internationalismus nur im Erdreich nationaler Sicherheit recht gedeiht” (77). As long as there are still grey areas with small warlords in power and an unclear political situation, the nation-state is needed as a law-enforcing centre. At the same time, Ghosh highlights what unites people across borders, insisting that shared historical, cultural, and human concerns do not always adhere to the same borders.

Looking glass and mirror are recurrent motifs in the novel and are used by the narrator to illustrate Tridib’s theory of invented places “where there was no border between oneself and one’s image in the mirror” (SL 36). Butt shows that “[i]nhabiting a world of human, geographical and political barriers, the narrator and Tridib have a vision, a vision to construct a free space (in a world without binaries) which is supposed to be above all temporal or spatial constraints” (4), foreshadowing the refutation of time by Rushdie and Sebald as explored in chapter four. As the arbitrariness of the partitioned home has shown, the Other in the mirror is only a creation of oneself; the interpretation of borders as barriers gives one back the reflection of one’s own invention. The short-sighted view is thus always a limited one as opposed to the one generated by distance. This brings us to the core of Tridib’s understanding of distance and invented places, which will be dealt with in detail in the following section.

#### “LEARNING THE MEANING OF DISTANCE”

Investigating Tridib’s death, the narrator learns that what happens in one place can elicit violence thousands of kilometres away, a circumstance which also accounts

for the death of Tridib. The novel thus not only shows the interconnectedness of India and Bangladesh but also of South Asia and Europe. London is revisited by the novel before the war, during the Second World War bombings, in their immediate aftermath, and in the 1980s. This section draws the attention to two examples of the narrator's exploration of London, Brick Lane and Solent Road, where a distanced understanding transcends epistemologies. Tridib's theory of imagined places is then explained in more detail before the final part of this section turns again to the narrator's research into the 1964 riots: hunched over maps he is now able to free himself of his mentor's grip so that he not only follows his theories, but can also apply them himself.

The connection between India and London is provided by an old friendship between the narrator's family and the Price family. Lionel Tresawsen worked in Calcutta (SL 63) and met Tridib's grandfather, Mr Justice Chandrashekhhar Datta-Chaudhuri, occasionally at séances conducted by a large Russian lady: "their friendship was sealed across innumerable planchette tables while waiting for the large lady to summon her favourite spirit, the all-seeing astral body of Ivan the Terrible" (SL 64). Tresawsen eventually returned to England to ensure that his children received the best education, but the families' friendship had been kept alive over the following generations, for example through the hospitality of Mrs Price, Lionel Tresawsen's daughter, in London, where Tridib's father went for an operation in 1939/40 (SL 15) and from which the long correspondence between Tridib and May Price emerged (SL 21). The narrator's engagement with the English family friends reveals how spatial distance cannot only be overcome, but even enable an ontological way of thinking that exceeds the limitations of strictly scientific approaches, as the two following examples of the narrator's visit to Brick Lane and Solent Road show.

When the narrator first visits England, he meets with his cousin Ila and Nick Price, May's brother and Ila's husband, for a shopping trip to Brick Lane. He seems to know the street – and especially its history – better than the two locals, for he has learnt about the place through his imagination. While at first the two Londoners cannot believe that the narrator knows much about it because of the distance and because he has never been to the street before, they are soon proven wrong. Upon seeing Brick Lane for the first time, the narrator admits that he is surprised by how different it looks compared to what he expected, especially because: "I had no

means of recognising the place I saw; it did not belong anywhere I had ever been” (SL 123), which does not surprise Ila who feels confirmed in her view that it is all new to him: “I’ve always told you. You know nothing about London” (SL 124).

It is one detail of the place’s past that helps the narrator to regain orientation. Nick points at a mosque and explains that it used to be a synagogue when Brick Lane was a predominantly Jewish area until shortly after the war. As a response, the narrator exclaims: “That was when your uncle lived here! [...] Your uncle Alan” (SL 124). Nick is not aware that one of the Tresawsens has lived in the area, but the narrator can now access his map of Brick Lane because he can fill the topography with life. Confidently, he leads the group to the house in which Alan used to live. The focalisation seems to shift here towards a zero focalisation. It can, however, also be an internal focalisation: Alan dies during a bomb attack and it was Tridib who “came to Brick Lane with Mayadebi and Mrs Price to collect Tresawsen’s things” (SL 127). The “invented depiction [...] must have been told as a wartime story to Tridib and then, much later, to the narrator as one of the many stories that Tridib tells about his travels” (Dengel-Janic 74). Because of the authoritative position of Tridib for the narrator, the story is accepted as fact and is therefore now retold in this matter-of-fact style. It is because of Tridib’s narration that the narrator has such a good recollection of where the house is to be found, which also explains why after a brief visit to the travel agency, which now finds itself on the ground floor of the building, the narrator is “trying to see it with a great hole gouged out of its side, as Tridib had” in the past, while Nick “look[ed] back at the Taj Travel Agency” of the superficial present (SL 131). The passage about the visit to Brick Lane shows how binaristic epistemologies do not do justice to the place, since “Brick Lane is presented both as the Jewish area of the War period and as the Indian area of the 1970s” (Huttunen, para. 10), overcoming temporal and cultural distance and difference and merging Jewish and Indian histories of migration.

An even earlier visit to a London neighbourhood with Ila and Robi only four weeks after his arrival further showcases the narrator’s ability to know London from a distance. This is also when he meets Nick for the first time. The narrator tries to show off, saying that he has “known the streets around here for a long time, too” (SL 68) and pointing out street names and their history, again linking it to Nick’s family history during the Second World War. His source, so the narrator says, is Tridib, but his authority is questioned when one of the supposedly bombed out

streets is visited and found intact. Robi challenges the narrator's authority further when he asks him if he did not know that those kind of bombs which would destroy the entire street were only developed much later in the war (SL 69). This argument of historiographical fact versus lived experience has not been resolved and consequently "the question of authority [...] is left open; the argument does not continue", as Huttunen rightly states (para. 7). The reader's sympathies, however, are clearly directed in favour of the narrator's position. The narrator now only tells the reader, not the other characters, that he "had not expected to see what Tridib had seen [...], knowing it to be lost in a forty-year-old past" (SL 70). Instead he is looking for a deeper truth, one that is beyond the visible: the narrator sees the houses, trees, children, family cars and modern lifestyle "and yet, despite the clear testimony of my eyes, it seemed to me still that Tridib had shown me something truer about Solent Road a long time ago in Calcutta, something I could not have seen had I waited at that corner for years" (SL 71). This view requires a temporal and spatial distance from an object, which is always also linked to the personal story behind it.

The narrator is able to look beyond the surface because his mentor Tridib taught him to use his imagination. Not having been able to travel as a young boy, the narrator enjoyed Tridib's storytelling of faraway places. It was in these moments that Tridib had given him "worlds to travel in and [...] eyes to see them with" (SL 24). Black links this technique to Proust and the shadow puppets on the wall with reference to Elaine Scarry, who "argues that novels often convince us of the vivid and solid character of imaginary objects through a form of imaginative contrast, in which particular elements gain solidity when compared with gauzier visual images" (*Fiction Across Borders* 59). In both cases, in *Remembrance of Things Past* and in *The Shadow Lines*, the "narrator gives us the specificity of plural and precisely identified angles of vision and offers himself up as the comparatively thin specter against which the roofs [of Colombo] come into being" (Black, *Fiction Across Borders* 59). In line with Lewis, Black argues that the narrative consequently discloses "omniscience as [...] deliberately flimsy" (*Fiction Across Borders* 59) and promotes instead a "refusal of traditional narrative authority" (60). The distanced "story-telling protagonist[ ]" (Lewis 210) and the "shadowiness of the narrator's persona" (Black, *Fiction Across Borders* 59) are, according to Ghosh, a reference to Proust's works, which "offered many very interesting possibilities so

far as narrative is concerned” that he was not able to find in “the Anglo-Irish-American variant of modernism” (Hawley 8). In Proust’s *The Way by Swann’s*, the projections of Golo “accommodated every material obstacle, every bothersome object that he encountered by taking it as his skeleton and absorbing it into himself” (14). That material world is thus absorbed into the imagination, which in turn leads to an understanding of the world which transcends the walls of Marcel’s bedroom: this magical world “seemed to emanate from a Merovingian past and send out around me such ancient reflections on history” (14). Temporalities in Proust’s work are thus not merely conflated or collapsed but allow for an extended perspective as is also the case with distanced and imagined places in Ghosh’s novel.

Ghosh’s narrator is disappointed by Ila because what is magical to him is mundane to her: she is so well-travelled, but connects places only with airport toilets. It is precisely the lack of spatial distance, the “tired intimacy” and “dull” familiarity, which the narrator holds accountable for devaluing a place (SL 25). Consequently, Ila does not understand the narrator’s enthusiasm when he is finally able to visit London and travel around, to which he retorts “[y]ou wouldn’t understand: to you Cairo was a place to piss in” (SL 26). In the narrator’s understanding, travelling, the imagination, and inventions are inextricably linked. When Ila asks him why they do not “just take the world as it is”, he replies that “the alternative wasn’t blankness” but a dependency on “other people’s inventions” (SL 39). However, he is never able to convince Ila “that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more nor less true, only very far apart” (SL 26) and she derogatively speaks of “those fairytale lands” (SL 29). Tridib highlights the importance of spatial distance for this understanding of the world and its places as imagined and invented. He says that it is not her fault that she cannot see the world as they do, since “the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all” (SL 26). It is thus important to create distance between oneself and a place in order to avoid a limited view on the world. Distance is here not a deficiency but a motor for a more encompassing and inclusive attitude.

*The Shadow Lines* brings together narratives of different historical events in different places, but stresses at the same time that this does not imply an equation of suffering and atrocity. Ila has been living in London most of her life and feels a

certain self-importance about being part of a culture that is “part of history” and argues that heroism is unique to the Second World War:

- You wouldn’t understand the exhilaration of events like that – nothing really important ever happens where you are.
- Nothing really important? I said incredulously.
- Well of course there are famines and riots and disasters, she said. But those are local things after all – not like revolutions or antifascist wars, nothing that sets a political example to the world, nothing that’s really remembered. (SL 128)

[...]

I gave up then, for of course, she was right: I knew nothing at all about England except as an invention. But still I had known people of my own age who had survived the Great Terror in the Calcutta of the sixties and seventies, and I thought I had at least a spectator’s knowledge of their courage, [...]. (SL 129)

Through Ila’s derogatory views, Ghosh exemplifies the limitedness of the Eurocentric perspective. Through the narrator he shows that the distant view as a spectator is not necessarily deficient: knowing England as an invention and being a spectator of courage – or more broadly – trying to engage in a dialogue rather than trying to mute the other, the narrator can stand up to Ila’s hierarchisation of historical importance. Spatial distance, so the novel tells us, should not lead to exclusion from shared memory, as each history is itself a global one, too.

During his research into the causes of the riots of 1964, the narrator takes a map to look at the distances involved. The riots in Khulna (today’s Bangladesh), which spilled over into Calcutta and Dhaka, were triggered by the theft of a sacred Muslim relic in Srinagar, Kashmir. But whilst the relic was returned to its place and the Kashmiri population in its diversity became more united than ever before, “[i]n Khulna, a small town in the distant east wing of Pakistan, a demonstration that was marching in protest against the theft of the relic turned violent. Some shops were burnt down and a few people were killed” (SL 278). This was the starting point for further religious and cultural riots which eventually also reached Dhaka, where Tridib, Tha’mma, her sister, Robi, and May visited Jethamoshai to convince him to come with them to India. On the map the narrator now measures the distance between Khulna and Srinagar in Kashmir and observes: “The distance between Khulna and Srinagar [...] was 1200 miles, nearly 2000 kilometres. It didn’t seem like much” (SL 283).



Then I tried to draw a circle with Khulna at the centre and Srinagar on the circumference. I discovered immediately that the map of South Asia would not be big enough. [...] It was an amazing circle. [...] It was a remarkable circle: more than half of mankind must have fallen within it. – And so, fifteen years after his death, Tridib watched over me as I tried to learn the meaning of distance. (SL 284)

In an interview with John C. Hawley, Ghosh explains that Proust's influence is reflected "in the ways in which time and space are collapsed in the narrative" and that he wanted "to do with space what Proust had done with time: that is, to make completely different instances of a continuum immanent in each other" (9), although we could see above that Ghosh's novel in fact goes beyond the idea of merely *collapsed* times and spaces. Stylistically he pursues this aim through the extensive use of analepses and prolepses which allow us to describe the novel as anachronological, imitating Proust's collapse of temporalities. With each of these movements through time, however, Ghosh also takes the reader on a journey through space. Memory's generational impact, as outlined above, is also a spatial one, as we saw with *The Shadow Lines*: the memory as triggered by the madeleine or by the discussion after the lecture not only brings back a suppressed past, but it also brings back the places related to it. In the case of Ghosh's novel, these are always plural as memories can be thought of as a chain-reaction and endless deferral to yet another place and history.

In a second experiment, the narrator takes Milan in Italy as the centre and draws another circle with a 1200-mile radius. Again he is amazed by all the places it touches and includes. The reader is thus invited to transfer the plot of the novel to her own continent. Distance is again to be understood as ordinary and also as random:

With my limited knowledge, I tried to imagine an event, any event, that might occur in a city near the periphery of that circle (or, indeed, much nearer) – Stockholm, Dublin, Casablanca, Alexandria, Istanbul, Kiev, any city in any direction at all – I tried to imagine an event that might happen in any of those places which would bring the people of Milan pouring into the streets. I tried hard but I could think of none.

None, that is, other than war. (SL 285)

War is the linking element between the novel's original setting in South Asia and the imagined event affecting Milan and thus Northern Africa and Europe. Atrocity and violence elsewhere are not compared, but they are identified as triggering the

same traumatic aftereffects, both temporally and spatially. Initially the narrator had only passively understood Tridib's concept of imagining and inventing a place. He was not quite able to apply these ideas himself independently and only saw and judged others and their understanding of the world through the eyes of his former mentor, through Tridib's inventions. In front of the map, he is now for the first time moving beyond merely repeating Tridib's words. Similarly to the ending of Sebald's *Austerlitz*, as the following chapter will demonstrate, the narrator's own quest prompts the active reader to take the questions further and "to imagine space above the narrow confines of a singular culture, nation, territory and community" (Butt 4). But while both authors try to offer access points to wider historical topics, the narratives nevertheless remain personal stories which "retain[ ] the specifics of each of its components" (Huttunen, para. 13 ). If they bridge gaps, they also make sure not to conflate the individual narratives, but rather 'to learn the meaning of distance.'

### **Conclusion: Glimpses through the Looking Glass**

While Sebald's novel, as we will see in more detail in the second chapter, centres around a traumatic core and encircles it through references, Ghosh looks at this core through 'glimpses' that provide more contextualisation. The whole novel is characterised by Proustian flashbacks: individual words or objects conjure up the past with the consequence that the narrative levels blur for a couple of sentences. At points it is hardly noticeable when the narrative situation switches completely and the story exceeds the possible knowledge of the narrator. But Ghosh always gives enough context to regain orientation. These stylistic features highlight two issues which are also predominant in post-Second World War writing: firstly, that past and present, history and the personal are intertwined and secondly, that memory is always fragmented.

This fragmentation brings us back to Rushdie's stereoscopic vision: a telescope would only enable the viewer to see something that is far away as if it were closer. The stereoscope on the other hand tries to imitate the three dimensions when looking at a two dimensional image. In order to perceive visual depth in everyday life, an object must be viewed from two different angles, which is to say with two eyes or through the movement of the head. The stereoscope is a piece of technology based on the same principle. It does not bring an object closer, but it can depict it

more realistically through putting things into different perspectives. This three-dimensional effect of an image is precisely what Ghosh's distanced glimpses can achieve both for a text and for memory. By taking glimpses into different characters' pasts, which often happens through revisiting dialogues, the narrator can now draw the right conclusions about the family secret of Tridib's death. Eventually the narrator is able to listen to the report of May, who witnessed the incident. But this, too, the narrator recognises, is only a glimpse through the looking glass, as nothing will be able to give this death meaning.

A third issue, however, highlights a contrast to post-Second World War memory and writing: there was no clear end to Partition violence. As Ghosh's novel shows, Partition violence was ongoing and the process of dealing and coming to terms with it was much slower compared to Europe after WWII. Sebald's distanced style of reference works because the object referred to has already been established by those (writers) who came before him. There was a tradition he could build on. While Roy rightly discerns "a palpable shift from something akin to direct reportage to a more distinct theoretical accent" for literature of the "post-Partition generation" (109), we must nevertheless acknowledge that this development is slower and quantitatively smaller in comparison with post-Holocaust literature. Although there has always been writing on the partition of India after 1947, it is difficult to speak of an "almost obsessive preoccupation with the Partition on the part of the Indian novelists writing in English" as Roy does (131), unless every narrative about the conflict between India and Pakistan or migration from South Asia were considered Partition fiction. Ghosh, and for that matter also Rushdie and others, still have to fulfil a double function with their literature after Partition in simultaneously remembering and analysing memory.

If trauma is a kind of exile in the temporal dimension, this invites us to explore further this path of transnational Holocaust studies or comparative genocide research. Temporal, spatial and cultural distance might themselves be deficient and incomplete concepts, but they also highlight a simple truth: that we cannot revisit the places of the past. Nevertheless, they can help to prevent the appropriation of someone else's experience, while allowing for differentiated perspectives. Looking at Ghosh, Said, and Mann together allows us to trace distinctly exilic or expatriate themes and styles in support of Rushdie's 'double vision' and to consider expatriate

writing as a distinct mode of writing rather than a mere by-product of the development of other literary periods. World Literature then has the potential to go beyond “transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees” as well as “these border and frontier conditions”, as suggested by Bhabha (146), towards a more abstract but inclusive ethical project such as that defended by Damrosch.

Through glimpses, references and multiperspectivity, Ghosh and Rushdie offer strategies for further personal engagement with the past, be it in Europe or in South Asia: Ghosh’s looking glass and Rushdie’s stereoscope are both means of looking into the past while not leaving one’s actual position in the present. This list will now be complemented by Sebald’s periscope.

## 2. Postcolonial Discourse in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*

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The first chapter introduced distance as a fruitful strategy to look at the Second World War and the partition of India together. While the third chapter will focus on spatial distance and European history in the (post)colonial context, this chapter will examine the implications of temporal distance and postcolonial issues in a post-Second World War text: W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001). In this chapter I will demonstrate that in Sebald's text temporality and chronology are complicit with colonial power structures themselves, which in a second step Sebald tries to subvert through an alternative understanding of time. In a second subchapter, it will be shown how Sebald also stylistically subverts these hierarchies.

It is through addressing and deconstructing temporal linearity that the link between postcolonial and post-Holocaust discourses can be drawn: Many post-Holocaust narratives are characterised by their fragmentariness; linear storytelling has been superseded by episodic structures which are directly linked to anachronology. Yet one also has to pay attention to the different narrative levels in order not to conflate different narrators or focalisation and consequently not to conflate different temporalities. Due to the demand for an 'authentic' voice with the right to speak, post-Second World War fiction in particular foregrounds the question of 'Who speaks?'. *Austerlitz* is particularly pertinent to this analysis for several reasons: it is not narrated chronologically and the text offers little help for the reader to reproduce a correct chronology of events, even though it is loaded with references to time. While the narrative is primarily concerned with the past, it is also concerned with time more broadly. Thirdly, Sebald's trade mark is the multitude of narrative levels. *Austerlitz* thus serves as an ideal case study for our purposes due to the relatedness of temporality as manifestation and subversion of the (colonial) power and narrative situation in both form and content.

While instances of the colonial and postcolonial in *Austerlitz* have already been discovered (see especially Ryan and Walder), the question remains as to what insights can be won from a postcolonial perspective. An analysis of the use of selected metaphors in *Austerlitz* through a postcolonial lens reveals that Sebald aims at transcending boundaries – boundaries that, according to Sebald, only *seem* to divide past and present.

Was die historische Monografie nicht leisten kann, ist, eine Metapher oder Allegorie eines kollektiven Geschichtsverlaufes zu produzieren. Aber erst in der Metaphorisierung wird uns Geschichte empathisch zugänglich. (Löffler 137)

Sebald notably makes extensive use of metaphor, metonymy, allegory, and comparisons more generally whenever the protagonist tries to make sense of the past. Sebald does so to such a degree that it can be doubted whether it helps to clarify details of a past – or the concept of history and memory – or only reflects Austerlitz's own confusion.<sup>4</sup> While a certain degree of fragmentariness and conceptual haziness lie in memory's nature, it might not be appropriate to speak of the singular noun *Metaphorisierung*, suggesting a clear, singular use of the literary device, but rather of the plural *Metaphorisierungen*. Layers of memory can be archeologically excavated through an analysis of the architecture of representative buildings and train stations, and the latter in particular also reveal the dynamic and constantly changing character of memory. Photographs tell us about the past, but at the same time they remind the viewer of all that is not captured in the image and of what neither historical research nor memory can ever regain. The wanderer finds himself trapped in a Kafkaesque labyrinth where he cannot see his way out; the metaphor of impaired sight leads back to the traumatic core that the archaeologist tries to discover.

Through this wealth of metaphors and comparisons, *Austerlitz* is thus an interesting case for the analysis of the function of these metaphors in the context of memory and trauma studies. Moving away from the common question of what the metaphors signify, I am particularly interested in how Sebald's *use* of these stylistic devices for making statements about time reflects his interest in power structures and oppression. The first subchapter will therefore be concerned with demonstrating how the intersection of colonialism and the Second World War in *Austerlitz* can usefully be approached through the topic of time. It is in this triangular constellation that the work challenges established hierarchies and power structures with regard to both the colonial past and the Second World War. While

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<sup>4</sup> Bettina Mosbach claims that Sebald's "'gleichgültige' Verwendung" is due to a seemingly conceptual inaccuracy (67). However, it might in fact be one of several instances where what looks like a flaw serves another purpose than that of factual accuracy. We also have to bear in mind how closely related allegory, metonymy, metaphor, and similes are, one often serving as a foundation for the other rather than a separate concept (Goatly 121; see also Fludernik, *Introduction to Narratology* 73–77).

the linear concept of time stands for oppression, Sebald and his characters advocate an alternative concept of time which is based on the idea of timelessness through movement. A metaphor of particular importance, here, will be the moth. These dynamic and anti-hierarchical ideas will be analysed on a stylistic level in the second subchapter, where again a non-Eurocentric view is promoted: together with the explicit critique of the Western colonial past, narrative techniques which seek to represent this past as a dominant and singular narrative from a reliable perspective are under attack.

## **2.1 Time as (Colonial) Power**

Austerlitz attacks Western civilisation and the colonial invaders for oppressing peoples by bringing them what the coloniser perceives as progress – in this case in the form of time – but in fact only extending their own enslavement to the power of time to others. This skeptical and critical attitude towards civilisation, technology, and progress also characterises Sebald’s text with regard to architecture. While it is often simplistically argued that places in *Austerlitz* help to trigger personal memories (Pethes 28) or that for example “the architecture of railway stations provides both visual orientation and ambiguous metaphor for the construction and deconstruction of memory” (Sicher 194), a more nuanced analysis of the Antwerp train station, the Justice Palace in Brussels, and the French national library reveals the deconstruction of power structures linked to specific sites as similar to the deconstruction of the power of time.

Laura García-Moreno elaborates on Austerlitz’s “distaste for the monumental” and “preference for the small scale” (366; 363). One of the first monumental buildings to be mentioned in the text is the Antwerp train station, providing the reader with a concrete colonial context. Sebald’s narrator initially observes that the building is rather pompous instead of merely functional and notices a “Negerknaben” with a camel (A 8). He then pictures the station how it might have looked one hundred years ago, full of animals in cages. Even though a lot of surfaces have become dismal, a few silver and gold elements are still shimmering. These impressions of Belgian colonialism are complemented by the narrator’s first encounter with Austerlitz. Austerlitz shares his expert knowledge, musing in particular on the capitalistic nature of the colonial undertaking. He equates the train station as a trade centre with a cathedral and shows how architectural elements of

the Pantheon have been adopted. “Kapitalakkumulation” (A 17) had become the eleventh commandment. Surprisingly, however, the idol worshipped is not King Leopold II but time with its symbol the clock: “Und unter all diesen Symbolbildern, sagte Austerlitz, stehe an höchster Stelle die durch Zeiger und Zifferblatt vertretene Zeit” (A 17). It is positioned, he notes, even above the royal coat of arms. Austerlitz then shows how the clock is almighty, as all travellers have to obey its dictum. “Gleichschaltung” (A 18) is the key word to provide a direct link to the Holocaust (see also Ryan, “Kolonialismus” 270): according to Judith Ryan, Europe and the Congo in *Austerlitz* are witnesses to the same “Riß in der Welt, der als eine historische Spur von Gewalt und Unterdrückung zu verstehen ist,” allowing for a consideration of the expansionist plans of Nazi Germany against the backdrop of colonial developments (“Kolonialismus” 281). Helmut Schmitz agrees: “im Wartesaal des Antwerpener Bahnhofs [...] wird die Ära hochkapitalistischen kolonialen Grandeurs mit dem Holocaust verknüpft und erscheint so als dessen Vorstufe” (259). Hannah Arendt had already paralleled Imperialist principles with those of the NS period to show how “nineteenth-century imperialism prepared the stage for the horrors of the Holocaust” through bureaucracy becoming a “new device[ ] for running societies and ruling foreign peoples” (Walder 96). Power structures and hierarchies are not established by the Belgian colonisers in the first instance, but by the restricting categories of time to which they subjugate themselves. The empire did not serve the purpose of liberation from its own oppressor, i.e. the supremacy of clock-time, but of gaining power through the submission of more peoples to the already existing rule of time veiled as progress (which is further exemplified by the absurdity of fortress constructions such as Fort Breendonk).

The final architectural example in this early encounter between Austerlitz and the narrator is the Justice Palace in Brussels. The three Belgian, monumental buildings – the Antwerp train station, Fort Breendonk, and the Justice Palace – are related to trade, violence, and justice. Since the Justice Palace is depicted as Kafkaesque, there is a suggestion that even this institution cannot serve an ethical purpose, but that it has merely become another means of exploitation and domination. Considering the social and historical context of its construction, this is even more apparent: before the building “towered above Brussel’s [sic] poorest neighbourhood, the Marolles, and served as a reminder to the people of what



awaited them should they step out of line”, the site was used for executions (Arnold-de Simine 165). Justice and power have become interchangeable systems. Like the clock in the train station, the Justice Palace is a point of orientation and guidance. People look up to it and have their lives dictated by the power it represents. The Justice Palace is a means to maintain power over those who are inferior. However, the need for the regularisation of processes only arises because those in power feel the pressure of the ticking of the clock.

These buildings are contrasted to the new buildings described later in the book, such as the new Bibliothèque nationale in Paris. We are again presented with monumental architecture that goes hand in hand with destruction; Stephan Seitz speaks of “Auslöschung der Vergangenheit, die durch Abriss und Überbauung alle Spuren vorhergehender Geschichte zerstört” (130), an interpretation that is reflected in Austerlitz’s account of his conversations with the library assistant Henri Lemoine, who says that “die ganze Geschichte im wahrsten Wortsinn begraben ist unter den Fundamenten der Grande Bibliothèque unseres pharaonischen Präsidenten” (A 405). So while on the one hand, Marianne Hirsch fears that memories of the parent generation are “so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own rights” (“Surviving Images” 9), this view is countered by Sebald: the old memory is not monumental, the new one is rather visualised as a new building, destroying and replacing the past. Behind this project stands again a powerful ruler, who can be either the president of the national library or the President of France at the time.

In the case of the Bibliothèque nationale, the buried past is that of a former *Lager*, where goods of deported Jews were collected and redistributed. James L. Cowan, however, notices that the location of the *Lager* was not at the exact site of the library and remarks that research here has avoided the question of historical authenticity. In fact, the *Lager* was 500 meters south of today’s library; it was bombed by the Germans in 1944, rebuilt as a warehouse after the war, and eventually demolished in 1997 to enable the construction of the Université de Paris 7 (Cowan 67–68). This deviation from the factual truth supports an underlying metaphorical truth: “the modern warehousing of information threatens to destroy the traces of the site of human suffering” (Cowan 76). The railway system and the nearby Gare d’Austerlitz “mimic[ ] the network of iron supports that connect the glass panes in nineteenth-century railway stations as well as in the Paris arcades”

(Ryan, “Fulgurations” 238) and at the same time establish a link between the Paris national library, and monumental buildings more generally, and the deportations during the Holocaust. *Pace* Hirsch, then, not only does this mean that one does not come to terms with the past, but it also means that a confrontation with the past is actively avoided. As opposed to historicist architecture that is subject to time itself and can consequently turn into a ruin, glass constructions, says Walter Benjamin, do not invoke the past. They are not progressive and innovative; through their monumentalism and enforcement of order they “stand[ ] in the tradition of, rather than opposition to, historicist architecture” (Arnold-de Simine 154; 157).

This counter-productiveness of capitalism and ‘progress’ as exemplified by architecture is mirrored in Sebald’s reading of Paul B. Jaskot’s *The Architecture of Oppression: The SS, Forced Labor and the Nazi Monumental Building Economy*. Sebald’s copy is held together with most of his library in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach. Jaskot’s book was published in 2000, which means Sebald must have read it shortly before the publication of *Austerlitz*. As marks and notes in Sebald’s copy show, his reading focused on the working conditions of the labourers who had to procure brick. Sebald highlighted a passage which describes the absurdity of the SS economy and its (ab)use of its workforce:

The development of SS economic enterprises was extremely volatile and, more often than not, responsive to particular crises that occurred in the building economy, domestic programs and foreign policy. The SS attempted to resolve these crises through the application of more violence; this led ultimately to the self-destruction of its economic ventures. (Jaskot 9)

Because productivity needed to be increased, each worker was supposed to work longer and harder; economic considerations meant that money could not be spent on a maximal workforce. The violence used to achieve this goal transformed humans into material. Amir Eshel identifies this as the culmination of the demands of capitalist modernity (*Futurity* 190), with the consequence of even less productivity and more economic struggles and therefore more violence and inhumane working conditions.

Sebald’s dialectic approach to his work’s content as well as his style has been described by Ben Hutchinson as “Kritik des eigenen Fortschrittes” (*Die dialektische Imagination* 49) and goes back to Norbert Elias’s *Studien über die Deutschen*. Sebald marks the following passage that could equally function as a definition of

Sebald's 'Fortschrittskritik': "Im Zusammenhang dieses breiten Umschwungs verloren auch Begriffe wie 'Zivilisation' und 'Kultur' ihren Bezug auf Prozesse, auf fortschreitende Entwicklungen und wurden zu Begriffen, die auf unveränderliche Zustände verwiesen" (Elias and Schröter 176). This sounds very much like a continuation of Benjamin's train of thought and it is indeed surprising that Elias does not refer to Benjamin or Theodor W. Adorno in this passage. Benjamin states that "[d]ie Barbarei steckt im Begriff der Kultur selbst" (584; for further elaborations see Hutchinson, *Die dialektische Imagination* 4–8) and the national library in Paris serves as a prime example. Due to "the utter unsuitability, from a librarian's perspective, of the glass towers for the storage of books" (Cowan 63), the library not only fails to fulfil its aim of social, cultural, and scientific education, but it also restricts the possibility for progress itself; "the hypermodern is really a regression" (Cowan 61–62) or, as Martin Modlinger concludes, as "concentration camp of books' and prison of words, the Bibliothèque Nationale is ready to inscribe the crimes of humanity on the backs of its students" (351). The Babylonian building takes the reader back to earlier ages "where semi-divine rulers exercised absolute domination and power" (Cowan 62). Furthermore, the library's holdings are merely a selection of what is judged valuable for a society by some; its visitors can only acquire knowledge within the limits of this canon. Sebald's critique has its foundation in the inherent absurdity of the subject matter.

A comparison with the national library at its former site, rue de Richelieu, reveals that this is a fundamental problem of all libraries and archives rather than just of the Bibliothèque François Mitterrand. Austerlitz experienced the library at the site Richelieu as a place of solidarity (A 366) where the green desk lights have a positive and soothing effect (A 387–88). He has a sense of connectedness to those who are in the same reading hall and those who were there before him (A 388). Sebald includes a picture here of the "Salle Labrouste", which is described by Benjamin as follows:

Diese Niederschrift, die von den pariser Passagen handelt, ist unter freiem Himmel begonnen worden wolkenloser Bläue, die überm Laube sich wölbte und doch von den Millionen von Blättern, in denen die frische Brise des Fleißes, der schwerfällige Atem des Forschers, der Sturm des jungen Eifers und das träge Lüftchen der Neugier rauschten, mit vielhundertjährigem Staube bedeckt worden. Denn der gemalte Sommerhimmel, der aus

Arkaden in den Arbeitssaal der pariser Nationalbibliothek hinuntersieht, hat seine träumerische, lichtlose Decke über ihr ausgebreitet. (571)

While Austerlitz obviously enjoys working there, he also feels “eine[ ] Art von ständiger Regression, die sich in der bald vollkommen unübersichtlichen Form meiner immer mehr sich verzweigenden und auseinanderlaufenden Aufzeichnungen niederschlug” (A 367). Trying to read and to write in order to complement his own work, he is hindered by the very same action. His frustration peaks when he watches a film with the title “*Toute la mémoire du monde*” (A 368). The title discloses the overambitious project of the national library. It wants to be more than a collection of historical accounts; it wants to preserve the living and dynamic side of time as well: memory. All memories of the whole world shall be stored in this archive. As an archive it will never be able to live up to these expectations and Austerlitz’s “Regression” shows precisely the limitations of canonisation. Eventually the fellow readers at the library and those before them “scheinen sich aufgelöst zu haben in die kühle Luft” (A 388), mirroring the library’s failure.

Ryan states that the Antwerp Central Station and the French national library “are both designed to exude power” and to represent its “oppressive functions” (“Fulgurations” 238); we can now see *how* this has been achieved by Sebald. Monumental buildings depicted in *Austerlitz* are shown as they try to exert power and domination on a colonial as well as on a cultural level, yet they can never live up to their promise of bringing progress because the oppressor is oppressed himself, not noticing his or her own submission to the power of time. The whole process is shaped by this dialectics of progress and regress – “Fortschritt” and “Verfallszeit” (Benjamin 575, italics mine). The depiction of the colonisation of time is one example of this absurdity, mirroring and being closely related to time as “a central tool of capitalist modernity, an expression of the brutal forces that exterminated humans in the death camps” (Eshel, *Futurity* 187) and further stressed by Austerlitz’s visit to the Royal Observatory in Greenwich.

It is crucial to notice that “Sebald’s past/present is Benjamin’s former future” and that therefore a major difference is that Sebald does not follow the idea of a historical apocatastasis (García-Moreno 366). “Momente der Devianz, in denen sich die Chance auf den Ausbruch aus der katastrophischen Wiederholungsstruktur

manifestiert” (Mosbach 68) cannot be easily found in *Austerlitz* – if there are any at all – and might be more of a symptom of discomfort with a deeply pessimistic conclusion. Ryan agrees that “*Austerlitz* largely abandons even the shred of hope for illumination that flickers through Benjamin’s work” (“Fulgurations” 235). Looking at an explicit reference to the perversion of justice in the NS period in the context of time (A 251) is therefore promising if we want to move beyond Benjamin. Similar to the Justice Palace in Brussels, the court system in Germany and occupied Czechoslovakia did not serve the purpose of truth finding but acted rather as a henchman for the ruling authority. The main aim was to secure power at the expense of the individual’s rights. To achieve this, time was almost annihilated for the subject: “Für ein Vergehen, einen bloßen Verstoß gegen die herrschende Ordnung, konnte man, nachdem man *neunzig Sekunden Zeit* gehabt hatte, sich zu verteidigen vor einem Richter, zum Tode verurteilt und *unverzüglich* gehenkt werden” (A 251, italics mine). The whole farcical system did not aim at justice and individuality but at uniformity and obedience. This is also reflected in the changing models of movement. Scenes from a film that Austerlitz’s father watches in Munich during the early NS years epitomise this rigidly linear understanding, robbed of any possibility to deviate from the set norm: to commemorate the victims of the First World War, “*schnurgerade* ausgerichtet[ ], von der Macht des neuen Staats aus lauter *unbeweglichen* deutschen Leibern gebildete[ ] Kolonnen und Kompanien” march through the streets (A 243, italics mine) and in a later scene the audience sees small groups of Germans who “sich in einem schweigsamen, immer enger sie schließenden Zug alle in dieselbe Richtung bewegten” (A 244).

In the following sections, Austerlitz’s alternative model of time will be analysed, according to which time moves in swirls and loops like a moth or river: a dynamic characteristic which became static during National Socialism but also during colonialism, where instead of the seemingly random flickering of flying moths in the night air, there are now dead masses of people, void of agency and conscience, the objects – rather than the subjects – of an oppressive regime. Firstly, instances of the experience of temporal gaps will be looked at in more detail: here the past is tried to be maintained as a superior narrative, but these ventures eventually fail. Secondly, the moth as a metaphor of time will be introduced which, thirdly, visualises Austerlitz’s attempt of a theorisation of time through movement; the place of the Royal Observatory eventually brings us back again to the colony

and the Observatory's museum is revealed as the continuous attempt of official narratives of the past to dominate the present rather than promoting an open and dynamic understanding of memory.

#### STATIC PAST VERSUS DYNAMIC MEMORY

An early example from *Austerlitz*, which is also an early encounter of the protagonist with different temporalities, will help to introduce the complex system of a distanced past as opposed to dynamic memory. The abandoned house of Iver Grove, which Austerlitz visits with his history teacher Hilary, is a place where time seems to stand still. It thus provides an extreme instance of the past clashing with the present, against the backdrop of which initial conclusions regarding Sebald's use of metaphors on time can be drawn. The experience at Iver Grove will then be compared to Austerlitz's encounter with Věra. *Austerlitz* is rich with different experiences of the past and of time more generally, but valuable insights can be gained from this particular comparison: what begins with a similar feeling of "Verwirrung" ends more successfully in Prague as the clash of temporalities is overcome and turned into memory, which already points at a refutation of time as a forced linear progress(ion).

Inside the house of Iver Grove, Austerlitz comments that everything was exactly as it must have been 150 years earlier and lists pieces of furniture that represent power and wealth ("Der mächtige Mahagonitisch, beschwert von den eingebetteten Schieferplatten, [...] der Zählapparat, der goldumrandete Wandspiegel, [...]"), A 153). This is in stark contrast to other, decayed parts of the house: a large reception hall has been filled with corn and a second hall, decorated with stucco, now provides space for hundreds of potato sacks (A 151). What once must have been a proud bourgeois estate is now a barn. Hilary and Austerlitz can already sense this when they approach the site. As the house is situated on a hill, they have to look up to the "blinden Fenstern" that express a "stumme[s] Entsetzen", foreshadowing its "schandbare[s] Ende" (A 151). Interestingly this decayed condition is not the end – its catastrophe is yet to come. This catastrophe might be the mere fact that parts of the house did not continue in time and therefore will never actually reach the point of its catastrophe; consequently, there is no opportunity for a development to a better or a new beginning. The house, not its viewer, is appalled (*entsetzt*); the value system, according to which its end can be

judged “schandbar,” is in fact its own value system, this self-awareness maybe its only remaining value. The absurd character of this place is first visible when the owner Ashman mentions that his ancestor “gegen sich selber eine Partie [Billiard] nach der anderen gespielt [hat]” (A 153). The ancestor played not *by* but *against* himself an unspecified but large number of games. And even though it does not matter who wins and loses, he has kept a neat record of his success (A 156). This is entered in a “Kontokorrentbuch” (A 153) such as a bourgeois tradesman uses to enter detailed information on his obligations to individual trade partners. Billiards is now seen, then, in a capitalistic context. But here the bookkeeping does not help to accumulate more wealth and therefore power: the ancestor’s books are an example of the absurdity of the absolute ambition for organisation and order.

It is equally absurd that although it was the ancestor’s habit to use the house’s own observatory to study the moon, an element so important for orientation and measuring time in navigation, the billiards room is described as follows: “Die Innenläden waren immer verschlossen geblieben, das Licht des Tages nie eingedrungen” (A 156). In a place where light and darkness do not take turns, where time does not pass, days cannot be measured. As a result, the historian Hilary senses a “Verwirrung der Gefühle” (A 156) while Ashman experiences this “Abgrund der Zeit” (A 157) as overwhelming: Ashman tells the two visitors that ten years after having sealed off the billiards room as well as the nursery, he entered for the first time and almost went mad due to the unnatural nature of the experience. His reaction is that of rage and aggression: in order to get rid of this pent-up emotion he goes to the backyard and shoots at the clock tower, at the object signifying the problem at hand: power and control. Eshel describes the big clock at the Antwerp train station as having the power of “[s]urveying from its central position all movements of its subordinates” and making them “adjust their activities to its demands” (“Against the Power” 84) and the same is certainly true for the clock tower at Iver Grove. The clock tower also visualises the discrepancy of the temporal experience: while for Ashman time continued, it did not in the nursery. Ashman realises this disconnectedness of the two time zones; just like the notches on the bedside cabinet, the bullet holes on the clock-face are still visible. Rebelling against the workings of time, Ashman in fact repeats the actions of his ancestors: by making the clock at the clock tower stop, he tries to stop the continuation of time. This is

left uncommented by Hilary, Austerlitz or the narrator, and the scene goes back to the narrator's and Austerlitz's walk in Greenwich.

Perspective, as always in Sebald's works, is crucial: one must not confuse Austerlitz's, or even the narrator's, perception with that of Ashman. The building represents Ashman's family history and its rupture. As they cannot connect to this history, Austerlitz and the narrator have withdrawn to the background of the narrative and the text is focalised through Ashman. Mediating someone else's story, they refrain from any judgment. They nevertheless know now that the windows are 'blind' to the passing of time, the house 'mute' because it had no story to tell and is facing a 'shameful fate' because there is no resolution. An attempt has been made to maintain the past, but this very fixation on the past forecloses any possibility for its descendants to connect to it; this was a doomed undertaking.

A similar experience of disconnectedness is described in Terezín where Austerlitz stares at a shop window, closely examining everything that is displayed (A 278). In both cases, Iver Grove and the shop window, the places are abandoned. They represent a dissociated and dead past. There is no opportunity for Ashman or Austerlitz to connect to these places as there is no one or nothing left that could establish a link between Austerlitz's reality and the past he sees. There is nothing that he can *remember*. Eshel's description of the Terezín shop window passage, which would be equally valid for Iver Grove, as the place of a "timeless kingdom of the dead" where "the time of the dead had never passed" ("Against the Power" 78), is not entirely accurate. It is not "timeless" because the categories associated with time are still functional. And it is not that the time had *never* passed; it is precisely *because* it passed that we can identify it as past and not the present. Eli Friedlander also states that according to Benjamin, an event only becomes historical in the aftermath: "Entsprechend ist für Benjamin Geschichte nicht nur gefärbt durch die Brille der Gegenwart, sondern erst die Beteiligung der Gegenwart verleiht der Geschichte vollständige Wirklichkeit und aktualisiert das historische Objekt" (79). And still this description does not entirely grasp what we can observe at Iver Grove; what is missing is the "Aktualisierung." Even though time is certainly ambiguous in the sense of being subject and object at the same time,<sup>5</sup> we cannot speak with Benjamin of a "Dialektik im Stillstand", as the time zones at Iver Grove are

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<sup>5</sup> "Zweideutigkeit ist die bildliche Erscheinung der Dialektik, das Gesetz der Dialektik im Stillstand. [...] Ein solches Bild stellt die Hure, die Verkäuferin und Ware in einem ist" Benjamin (55).



separate. *Stillstand* is a utopian concept for Benjamin and does not allow for this separateness. In *Stillstand*, past and present coincide:

Nicht so ist es, daß das Vergangene sein Licht auf das Gegenwärtige oder das Gegenwärtige sein Licht auf das Vergangene wirft, sondern Bild ist dasjenige, worin das Gewesene mit dem Jetzt blitzhaft zu einer Konstellation zusammentritt. Mit anderen Worten: Bild ist die Dialektik im Stillstand. (Benjamin 578)

Dialectic as a dynamic concept is not appropriate, then, to describe the encounter with a static and dead past. Benjamin's concept might perhaps be more appropriate in the context of memory, where the past is kept alive in the present. If the present determines the past and if this retrospection has the consequence that temporality is not necessarily causal or chronological (Friedlander 79–80), then it is only in memory that the past exists through the present.

When Austerlitz visits Věra, his family's neighbour and his former nanny, and enters the building with her flat for the first time again, he too, like his teacher Hilary before him at Iver Grove, experiences a "Verwirrung der Gefühle" (A 219). Before entering, he gives detailed descriptions of the building, so that the reader can easily follow his gaze. Noticing the stones under his feet and the cool air in the entrance area, the subjective experience of something that should be familiar to him is at the core of this *déjà vu* even though he does not yet know for sure that this is indeed a memory. Austerlitz feels the "unebenen Pflastersteine", thinking "als sei ich auf diesen Wegen schon einmal gegangen" (A 216). This mirrors Marcel Proust's narrator in *Finding Time Again*: he "could not help tripping up against the unevenly laid paving-stones" (174). Trying to find balance again, "I set my foot down on a stone which was slightly lower than the one next to it" and suddenly he has a *déjà vu* in the form of a happiness that he had earlier experienced at seeing the steeples of Martinville, or during the famous madeleine episode (174–75). Austerlitz's "Verwirrung der Gefühle", however, is not equally blissful: it is described as "glücklich[ ] und zugleich angstvoll[ ]" (A 219), leading to physical exhaustion and building up tension in Austerlitz and the reader before the meeting with Věra. Proust's narrator feels immediately how "all uneasiness about the future and all intellectual doubt were gone" (175) – a sorrowlessness that Austerlitz hopes to achieve from the following meeting with Věra, but does not actually attain. Recalling that Austerlitz suffers from several mental breakdowns, this can be traced

back to the fact that he does not have an idea or ambitions for his future. Petra Strasser argues that without a notion of one's own future, the past is equally a void (137). Time plays a crucial role here – as another element of rising tension, time is stretched for Austerlitz: “Es mochte eine Stunde verstrichen sein, bis ich endlich im obersten Stock an der rechtsseitigen Wohnung läutete, und dann eine halbe Ewigkeit, wie es mir vorkam, bis ich drinnen etwas sich rühren hörte” (A 219). Story time here is longer than discourse time; Austerlitz's subjective experience of the same time span, however, is considerably longer. “[M]ochte” and “wie es mir vorkam” reveal not only a degree of uncertainty but also an awareness of its subjectivity. This culminates in the actual encounter between Věra herself, who “trotz ihrer Gebrechlichkeit im Grunde ganz unverändert schien” (A 219), and Austerlitz. Similarly, neither her flat nor her furniture – which she took over from her great-aunt in 1933 – has changed, “weil Věra, wie sie mir sagte, sagte Austerlitz, seit sie mich und meine ihr so gut wie schwesterlich verbundene Mutter verloren hatte, keine Veränderung mehr ertrug” (A 220). This time the descendant, Austerlitz in this case, does not have to despair, because Věra herself is the link to connect him to the past. Ashman had no one to connect to, but Věra was so close to the family that she can be considered a family member. Claire Feehily illustrates how “[t]he role of the family as the institution for memorialising is repeatedly shown to have broken down” (185), but through the character of Věra, Sebald refuses to let personal and familial memory end with the death of biological relatives.

#### THE MOTH AS A METAPHOR OF TIME

If the Benjaminian characteristics of memory and time as dynamic and alive are predominant in *Austerlitz*, we must not prejudge whether the protagonist's obsession with the past indicates that “die Zeit in *Austerlitz* für Opfer und Überlebende still [steht]” (Schmitz 263). The standard research situation focuses on Austerlitz's notion of time as “verschachtelter Raum” (A 265) and memory as a construction; both are reflected in Sebald's style of the many levels of narration, or ‘periskopisches Verfahren’ (Doerry and Hage 233), and in the method of bricolage. However, this does not sufficiently describe the concept of time in *Austerlitz*, forcing us to move beyond the assumption that certain sites are inhabited or marked by layers of history (García-Moreno 371; Hutchinson, “Narrative Status” 174; Seitz

127). Layers imply the (co-)existence of separate time zones. The aspect of movement across these time zones, not through borders but crossings, is crucial for an understanding of time that is defined through space, as suggested by Sebald and Austerlitz. It overcomes the aforementioned separation and the fossilised stasis of the past, subverting its claim to domination.

One major image used by Sebald to depict movement in time and space is the moth. These little insects impress Austerlitz as a boy when he visits his friend Gerald and his family at Andromeda Lodge. The house is first presented as a kind of museum (“Naturhistorisches Museum”, A 122). Many different things are collected and exhibited in the house (stones, seashells, bugs, snakes, leaves), but it is the moths that are depicted on one of the photographs printed in the novel, and that therefore have a prominent position in the text (A 122). While one might first think that this is one of the many places exhibiting a dead past to which people no longer have access, it soon becomes clear that this place is indeed different: compared to Austerlitz’s dull life with his foster parents and at the school, Andromeda Lodge represents life to the boy. With its many connections to foreign countries through animals, stories, and the use of language and terms associated with colonialism (Ryan, “Kolonialismus” 276), it is a place outside the European sphere: “Im abgeschiedenen Andromeda Lodge, in der Nähe des Meeres, fühlt Jacques sich wie in einem Ferienasyl, wo der distanzierte, nicht-eurozentrische Blick auf die Welt der Normalzustand zu sein scheint” (Solheim 239). Austerlitz and Gerald spend summer nights outside in nature, watching moths appear and disappear as points of light in the darkness around them:

Die vor allem von Gerald bewunderten Leuchtstreifen, die sie dabei in verschiedenen Kringeln, Fahrern und Spiralen hinter sich herziehen schienen, existierten in Wirklichkeit gar nicht, erklärte Alphonso, sondern seien nur Phantomspuren, die verursacht würden von der Trägheit unseres Auges, das einen gewissen Nachglanz an der Stelle noch zu sehen glaube, von welcher das im Widerschein der Lampe nur einen Sekundenbruchteil aufstrahlende Insekt selber schon wieder verschwunden sei. (A 135)

What they see are streaks of light, not in the shape of lines but circles, swirls and loops that follow the moth like the tail of a comet. However, the moth is not actually there anymore. It is a belated perception of the moth, but one that nevertheless creates the *impression* of simultaneity. Gerald’s grandfather describes them as “Phantomspuren”: the moth itself has already disappeared, but its existence leaves

an immediate and visible trace. Through this trace the two boys notice more than just an image of or link to the past: it creates a timeless sphere that evokes and brings together the realities of the moth and in this case Austerlitz. Sebald overcomes the accustomed boundaries of past and present and opens up a space for the possibility of the non-linearity of time; time, he suggests here, might as well move in circles and loops, as we can also see in Austerlitz's musings on Newton's view of time as a river like the Thames. Time is an "unquantifizierbare Größe, die das lineare Gleichmaß nicht kennt, nicht stetig fortschreitet, sondern sich in Wirbeln bewegt, von Stauungen und Einbrüchen bestimmt ist, in andauernd sich verändernder Form wiederkehrt und, niemand weiß wohin, sich entwickelt" (A 147). The "nur einen Sekundenbruchteil aufstrahlende Insekt" reminds us of Benjamin's image, "worin das Gewesene mit dem Jetzt blitzhaft zu einer Konstellation zusammentritt" (Benjamin 578).<sup>6</sup> This also implies that these intersections can occur several times and potentially in different places, as can be seen in the highly improbable meetings of the narrator with Austerlitz. Just as the flickering of the light of the moths becomes visible but remains unpredictable, so the two characters meet coincidentally in different European cities and, thus, serve themselves as an illustration of the arbitrariness of time: these "considerable temporal gaps" (Ryan, "Sebald's Encounters" 133) might be considered a flaw in the plot, but they are in fact an important narrative device, even more so when we note that Austerlitz is a restless wanderer. He moves through Europe, chasing his family's traces of light whilst leaving his own traces behind for the narrator to perceive.

While on the one hand Sebald creates a net of concrete and (seemingly) historically accurate places, dates, and times, the linearity of time is on the other hand immediately subverted through these coincidences that remain without any explanation (Wohlfarth 204n122). Apparently expecting a realistic mode of

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<sup>6</sup> Judith Ryan draws a similar parallel between Sebald and Benjamin, referring to *Aufblitzen* as a motif in the *Arcades Project* and consequently to "the idea that moments of recognition and insight are like the flaring up of light" ("Fulgurations" 234). Focusing on an epiphany-like illumination, she does not see the temporal dimension and *Jetztzeit* in this particular instance. Another useful addition to Ryan's elaborations is centred around Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*. Ryan refers to Barthes's ideas of *punctum* and *studium*. Hutchinson's analysis of Sebald's translated copy of the Barthes text shows that Sebald underlines a definition of *studium* and even circles the word 'fulguration' (*Die dialektische Imagination* 63). So when Sebald introduces the word 'fulguration' in an essay about Ernst Herbeck (Ryan, "Fulgurations" 233), the perspective Sebald adopts is not only a Benjaminian but also a Barthesian one.

narration, Ryan identifies “manifestations of an underlying network of power and violence that has its origin in the long history of war, violence, and oppression that the novel also traces” (“Fulgurations” 239), while Irving Wohlfarth describes *Austerlitz* as flawed due to this “Überkonstruiertheit” (232). Although Wohlfarth acknowledges how the text disrupts the “Herrschaft der chronologischen Zeit, und damit Herrschaft überhaupt” (209), he does not leave space for what is unexplained. Manfred Jurgensen, for example, interprets these coincidences as an experience based on an “affinity between author, critic and reader,” leading to “understanding” and *leaving a space* for “self-discovery” (424). A literature of restitution is to Jurgensen one that derives “from individual readers’ personal responses to writers and their works” (433). Eric L. Santner terms this the “possibility of an encounter” (140), which will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter. The “documentary pretence of the novel actually becomes attenuated” (Santner 136), but as this pretence serves the larger purpose of offering access points, the accumulation of coincidences stands for the anticipation of an opportunity (Strasser 145) rather than a flaw. In addition to this they can certainly be attributed a structuring function through what Bettina Mosbach describes as a “Logik der Koinzidenz” (220).

The flickering of the moth stands, then, for the prolific aspect of the past, the possibility of memory described by Paul Ricœur (echoing Benjamin) as a “spiral movement that, through anecdotes and episodes, brings us back to the almost motionless constellation of potentialities that the narrative retrieves” (“Narrative Time” 186). The moth’s swirls and loops suggest the non-linearity of time, and together with the afterglow or flickering they urge us to question traditional concepts. The moth’s unpredictability makes it highly suggestive, as it allows people to see and thus connect to the flickering trace of the past. The images of the moth and of flickering occur in several more instances of Sebald’s text; as will now be seen, they have almost the quality of a leitmotif (although the following elaborations can only present a selection of examples, focusing on those that are less well researched).

#### AUSTERLITZ’S CONCEPTUALISATION OF TIME

The textual analysis started with emotional responses to experiences associated with oppressive moments of pastness in the present and continued with the moth as

recurring metaphor for a more inclusive and dynamic understanding of time. It will now turn to Austerlitz's own attempt at establishing a theory of time, as seems necessary after linear time in the context of colonialism, capitalism, and National Socialism has been revealed as inherently absurd. Austerlitz desperately tries to grasp this alternative concept of time that seems to be able to exist without its previously defining subcategories of past, present, and future. In one of many attempts to define it, he even goes as far as to say that time does not exist at all:

Es scheint mir nicht, sagte Austerlitz, daß wir die Gesetze verstehen, unter denen sich die Wiederkunft der Vergangenheit vollzieht, doch ist mir immer mehr, als gäbe es überhaupt keine Zeit, sondern nur verschiedene, nach einer höheren Stereometrie ineinander verschachtelte Räume zwischen denen die Lebendigen und die Toten, je nachdem es ihnen zumute ist, hin und her gehen können, und je länger ich es bedenke, desto mehr kommt es mir vor, daß wir, die wir uns noch am Leben befinden, in den Augen der Toten irreale und nur manchmal, unter bestimmten Lichtverhältnissen und atmosphärischen Bedingungen sichtbar werdende Wesen sind. (A 265)

It can be doubted whether Austerlitz or Sebald are really trying to show that time is in fact space and therefore a concept to be abandoned. Surely the four dimensions in which we think might be too limited to take anything spiritual or transcendental into consideration, and even the general concept of space is not enough or of the right kind – it has to be an interlocking space in order to suffice. The speaker stands in the tradition of a spatial metaphoricalisation of time. In *The Language of Metaphors*, Andrew Goatly explains that the concept of time is so abstract “that we can hardly conceptualize it on its own terms, but only in terms used from movement in physical space” (126). Goatly shows how even the clock's measuring of time works spatially: phrases such as *twenty past the hour*, can be interpreted as meaning literally ‘when the minute hand of the clock has gone a distance equivalent to twenty minutes past the 12’” (59, italics in the original). Even research on Austerlitz's concept of time is not exempt from this problem. One example is the article by Strasser, who works with the term “Zeitvektoren” to express the spatial dimension, multidirectedness, and movement (141). Therefore it is understandable that Austerlitz is not fully able to express his abstract concept of time, since with his many metaphors and allegories he can only approach it but never reach it. Mosbach describes this process as *tangentielle Annäherung* (58): Austerlitz tries to get to the

core of the issue, but when a certain point is reached, he drifts away again. Like a tangent he can only touch on the outer circle.

This failure can be rendered fruitful if the perspective is slightly altered to allow a focus on what is supposed to happen in this interlocking space: “verschachtelte Räume, zwischen denen die Lebendigen und die Toten, je nachdem es ihnen zumute ist, hin und her gehen können.” The purpose and function of this understanding of time is to show that movement, “hin und her gehen,” is again at the centre of an intersection of seemingly different time spheres. Time is no longer a barrier or a border between the dead and the living, but time itself now represents the crossing. And while language has all too often become a barrier, the stylistic device of the metaphor has become the only possible carrier of meaning and, as will be shown in chapter 4.2, of ontological creation. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have identified how “[m]etaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices and spiritual awareness” (193). Metaphors can help to (re)establish meaning through providing a coherent structure (139) and re-conceptualise an experience (Goatly 158). It would seem to be a successful means of dealing with trauma, as its “imaginative power contributes to the process by which a community can reconstitute itself” (Eshel, *Futurity* 7). Metaphor offers a platform for ideas to be approached from different angles without ever fixing on a definition. Goatly speaks of “pluralism in metaphorical interpretation”, as any “metaphorical expression might receive a number of different and partial interpretations, none of which amounted to an adequate paraphrase” (117). Looking at metaphor as *Übertragung*, as carrying across (*meta-phérein*), Salman Rushdie highlights the etymological relatedness of ‘translation’ and ‘metaphor’ in the context of migration, i.e. movement (Grass 77).

Meaning, one can further argue, is not carried over just once, it is constantly carried over. Metaphors in Sebald’s work cannot be tracked down to any single meaning for which the metaphor is a substitute (see also Mosbach 232–34), but rather to a process of negotiations, subject to the changing speakers and their contexts. These different contexts for each utterance are often not taken into consideration in metaphor theories. Blending, for example, is an interesting concept when arguing against metaphor as mere substitution, suggesting the projection of “material into a third space, the ‘blend space’” (Grady 8). This, however, seems to

create again a fixed understanding of metaphor. When put against the background of interaction theory, which reflects “ways in which metaphors may lead to reconceptualization of source domains” (Grady 10), we can see how all elements in the utterance, submission and understanding of a metaphorical expression can lead to a variety of meanings. Whilst it might be argued that this variety and diversity does not promote understanding, one could also further develop Joseph E. Grady’s thoughts: he highlights that “humans everywhere [seem to] share the basic patterns of perception and experience that are reflected in primary metaphors” (5). One example he uses to illustrate his point is the connection of ‘large’ and ‘important.’ The individual metaphor might not always lead to immediate understanding, but metaphor is the code that can be deciphered universally, and thus offers an alternative language to a realist descriptive mode that has arguably lost its usefulness after the trauma of the Holocaust. These thoughts will be developed further in the chapter on magical realism, where the magical redefines the realist mode of writing rather than burying it as inadequate for trauma and memory writing.

Through challenging the concept of time and space, the notion of life and death is challenged as well, which will ultimately lead to the idea of being outside of time. Trying to adopt the perspective of the dead, Austerlitz sees the possibility that the roles might be reversed: the living have become the moth, some kind of being, “Wesen”, which does not need to be specified because it is something universal. The moth itself is an insect that is associated with death (“Totenköpfe und Geistermotten”, A 132). It is attracted by light, which seems life-affirming rather than symbolising decay, but the actual contact with light also suggests death, when the moth comes too close to an artificial light source. The moth’s flight-to-light behaviour can be explained by the light compass theory. Orientation based on the light from the moon makes navigation easy and the moth is able to move in a straight line. Due to the close proximity of any artificial light source, however, these light waves lead to the paradoxical consequence that the moths move in circles or spirals (Altermatt, Baumeyer, and Ebert 260). Because the moth wants to reach its target in a direct way using light for navigation, it ends up moving in circles. Due to this discrepancy – needing light for orientation but thereby navigating into its own death – the moth is a fitting metaphor for the workings of time and a suitable allegory of the tension between the living and the dead. Like a moth, the *Wesen* moves about in the air and its traces become visible if the circumstances are right.



Visibility here means the realisation of the intersection and simultaneity of different times through movement. Equally visible is the written page of *Austerlitz*. Following Ricœur's thoughts that "narrativity, by breaking away from the obsession of a struggle in the face of death, open[s] any mediation on time to another horizon than that of death, to the problem of communication not just between living beings but between contemporaries, predecessors, and successors" ("Narrative Time" 188), we can argue that *Austerlitz* is a project both about the struggle in the face of death and about breaking away from it by attempting to transcend the limiting boundaries of time and death.

The return of the dead is described by Ruth Vogel-Klein as "Gegenzeitlichkeit." In her analysis of the *Colonel Chabert* passage, she shows how in *Austerlitz* the dead are given a voice not just through intertextuality but most of all through Sebald's subtle changes of the source by Honoré de Balzac. Austerlitz and Colonel Chabert are both characters who escaped death (Vogel-Klein 111); but more importantly, since it is Austerlitz who quotes Balzac, the statement on Napoleonic soldiers is transformed into "ein Sprechen über die Schoah, deren Erinnerung nicht abgeschoben wird in ein früher und damals, sondern 'unverhofft' in die Gegenwart einbricht" (112). Vogel-Klein's approach, however, seems to be one-directional: the past only enters into the present (Vogel-Klein 111). Austerlitz, by contrast, wants to describe a temporal realm that is beyond our established categories. As in the context of interlocking time-space there is no need to distinguish between past and present. It is more than just a site with different layers of history or the clash of different temporalities as experienced at Iver Grove – it is a truly timeless site in which categories of time have become redundant. Eshel traces several instances in which the past does not merely cast its shadow over the present and future but is also an ongoing experience and therefore not to be seen as a separate entity (*Futurity* 92). The second feature of 'Gegenzeitlichkeit' – "[die] Umkehrung der linearen Chronologie" (Vogel-Klein 100) – is not a suspension of linearity or chronology and therefore cannot quite capture what Austerlitz with difficulty tries to explain. In fact, Austerlitz's ideas on the shared realm of the living and the dead go even further back than his reading of Balzac. The shoemaker Evan is an important figure in the development of Austerlitz as a child, as he spends much time at his workshop. Evan is said to be a "Geisterseher" (A 78) and Austerlitz prefers Evan's stories to the psalms at Sunday school. "[Die] Verstorbenen, die das

Los zur Unzeit getroffen hatte,” are still visible to the human eye, according to Evan: “Wer ein Auge für sie habe, sagte Evan, der könne sie nicht selten bemerken” when they “flackerten” – when they are flickering like the flame of a candle (A 79). This light-like character is matched with movement again. The dead ‘gehen alleine’, ‘ziehen in Schwadronen herum’, ‘marschieren hinauf’ and once even overtake Evan’s grandfather: “[h]astig schritten sie dahin” (A 79). “Unzeit” can of course refer to an untimely death, considering Austerlitz’s obsession with the topic of time; however, I think that ‘Unzeit’ is also a first hint at the arbitrariness of the category of time as such. “Los zur Unzeit” can also mean that they now face a fate outside of the accustomed notions of time, as Birger Solheim points out: “Die Spukgeschichten des Schusters markieren für das Kind eine alternative Welt, in der die Schranken zwischen Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft durchbrochen sind” (323).

Being outside of time is the culminating thought in Austerlitz’s monologue on time addressed to the narrator:

Das Außer-der-Zeit-Sein, sagte Austerlitz, das für die zurückgebliebenen und vergessenen Gegenden im eigenen Land bis vor kurzem beinahe genauso wie für die unentdeckten überseeischen Kontinente dereinst gegolten habe, gelte nach wie vor, selbst in einer Zeitmetropole wie London. (A 147)

As examples, Austerlitz lists areas forgotten or untouched by civilisation – by which he means Western civilisation, as is made explicit by contrasting these undiscovered countries with London as the centre of the former British Empire. This strongly evokes thoughts of colony and coloniser: the coloniser bringing ‘progress’ in the form of technology and time. Austerlitz develops these and further thoughts on time as an invention, as something artificial and arbitrary, at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich (A 145), at the home of the Prime Meridian of the World – a place closely linked to the British Empire owing to its essential role for all navigation, travel and trade. During their long walk to the Observatory, Austerlitz’s conversations with the narrator are marked by surprising silences, and his monologue completely breaks off when they enter one of the buildings. They also do not encounter any other visitors to the Observatory while they visit the museum section where different kinds of clocks and watches are showcased. It is again a dead place with no living memories. The clocks represent the domination and power

of the coloniser or civilised over the ‘uncivilised’, veiled behind the pretence of ‘progress.’ As museum pieces, the clocks create a boundary between the time they represent and that of the visitor. They create the power of the past narrative over the non-witness. And yet time, so Austerlitz suggests, does not necessarily bring progress or improve lives; the ‘progress of time’ in the sense of the linearity of time – as evoked by Austerlitz’s thoughts on Newton and his “view of time as a masterable, definable entity” (Eshel, “Against the Power” 89) – must then be a flawed concept. In *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, Sebald even suggests that the mechanism of the clockwork itself destroys time (235) precisely by measuring and categorising it.

Austerlitz’s thoughts on being outside of time are followed by another reference to the realms of the living and the dead: “Die Toten seien ja außer der Zeit, die Sterbenden und die vielen bei sich zu Hause oder in den Spitälern liegenden Kranken, [...], genüge doch schon ein Quantum persönlichen Unglücks, um uns abzuschneiden von jeder Vergangenheit und jeder Zukunft” (A 147). “Zeit” here refers to “the linear representation of time, understood as a simple succession of nows” (Ricœur, *Time I* 63), which does not allow for something beyond or outside this category. The dead are not non-existent, they are simply not graspable with the traditional concepts. García-Moreno describes this simultaneity as timelessness, equally indicating that common categories of time have become redundant with the consequence of

releasing oneself from the powerful grip of the clock. This type of empathy requires that he [Austerlitz] relinquish subordination to that demanding machine, like the huge, menacing one at the Antwerp station, which he sees as complicit with capitalist notions of development, progress, accumulation. (376)

Time is perceived, in other words, as a limiting concept. A major concern to Austerlitz is to show that the realms of the living and the dead should not be separated by time, but should in fact be joined by it. This overcoming of separation and categorisation by imposed power structures lies at the core of Sebald’s inclusion of postcolonial concerns in this text which has entered the canon of post-Holocaust literature.

This subchapter started by looking at explicit examples of the colonial in architecture and monumental buildings. They are all associated with a discourse on

time which reveals their ambition of bringing progress as inherently absurd. Austerlitz, who claims never to have possessed any kind of watch or clock (A 147), tries to liberate his thinking from these restraints. Time's linearity needs to be replaced through a more dynamic understanding of time, which connects the past and the present and allows for dialogue and exchange. However, his theorisation of time fails, as this would mean fixing it again. The alternative, for Austerlitz, is to encircle it metaphorically, where meaning is less stable and constantly renegotiated: metaphor is thus a particularly fitting device as it is dynamic itself like the moth or memory. While the relevance of metaphor will be addressed again in chapter 4, the following subchapter will highlight further stylistic ways in which Sebald's work pursues the goal of destabilising hierarchies.

## 2.2 Sebald's Anti-hierarchical Style

The first examples to come to mind for complex language in Sebald's works are the famous sentence in *Austerlitz* describing the ghetto of Terezín, which stretches over eight pages, and the sparse use of paragraphs. García-Moreno concludes that "*Austerlitz* ironically has something monumental and overbearing about it in terms of its sheer length, the complexity of its syntax and structure, the lack of divisions that results in massive blocks of narrative, and the impressive range of material that it covers" (369). Whilst the analysis of time in *Austerlitz* supports an anti-hierarchical reading, which nevertheless has to remain utopian to a certain degree, the syntax and narrative levels follow a similar path. Sebald again tries to merge different time zones through bringing together the different reports in one account, which would in turn be visually represented in the long reported speech markers. In doing so, Sebald foregrounds the subjective nature of all narratives and the two sides of the narrator as speaker and listener. This bi-functionality extends to other characters of *Austerlitz*, too, and eventually reaches out to the reader; the transfer of roles can be understood in the spirit of movement as explained above in the context of time. At this point, however, the text seems to reach its limits: as the following analysis will show, the attempt at conflating different narratives and consequently different time zones is visible, just like the attempt at removing power from the narrator figure by integrating him as an equally passive and active element into the text; but the desire for a master narrative remains, although its value and truthfulness are questioned throughout the text. Sebald's aim of narrative levelling

is as aporetic as the new conceptualisation of time, so that the only remaining possibility is an eternal destabilisation and a denial of fixation – also with regard to style.

#### NARRATIVE LEVELS

The moths' traces of light are reflected in Sebald's extensive use of reported speech markers. They visually create a trace that recurs throughout the text. Short forms consist of just 'one report', usually "sagte Austerlitz" which can be accompanied by a phrase to express self-reflection and awareness of the possible inaccuracy of knowledge and memory (e.g. "soviel mir bekannt ist, sagte Austerlitz", A 377, or "so erinnerte ich mich nach Eintritt der Besserung, sagte Austerlitz", A 379). These structures are taken to their limits when they consist of three elements; this is frequently the case when the narrator reports meetings between Austerlitz and someone else, for example Henri Lemoine or Věra. In some instances the uncertainty about the accuracy of memory is on Věra's side – "[u]nd ich entsinne mich, so erzählte mir Věra, sagte Austerlitz" (A 230), "[i]ch glaube, sagte Věra zu mir, sagte Austerlitz" (A 253) –, in other moments Austerlitz doubts his own memory about the conversation with Věra: "Deine Mutter Agata, so begann sie, glaube ich, sagte Austerlitz" (A 239). This self-reflexivity certainly reveals a realistic assessment of memory. Hutchinson too comments that the "narrative uncertainty comes to reflect the historical haziness" ("Narrative Status" 175), going hand in hand with memory's haziness. The question of whether these many moments of doubt and uncertainty have to be interpreted as the manifestations of an unreliable narrator will be discussed later in this chapter. Through an analysis of these reported speech markers, the relationship of the different narrative levels will be evaluated. From Austerlitz's concept of time we would expect a similar anti-hierarchical style: the many narrative levels only create hierarchies in order to deconstruct them.

Through the omnipresence of these markers of reported speech, the mediated nature of the accounts is foregrounded. If Feehily claims that "Jacques recounts his story in what appears to be an unmediated way" (183), this is true only to a limited extent. Literature is always mediated as it is always narrated – in the first instance through the creation of a story by the author, in the second by an often fictional narrator figure. In the case of *Austerlitz*, Sebald as the author tries to distance himself from the level of plot by placing several narrators between himself and the

action. In an Interview with *Der Spiegel*, Sebald claimed that he followed the stylistic example of Thomas Bernhard: “Ich würde sein Verfahren als periskopisch bezeichnen, als Erzählen um ein, zwei Ecken herum – eine sehr wichtige Erfindung für die epische Literatur dieser Zeit” (Doerry and Hage 233). With the reported speech particles, the narrator brings himself into the foreground even though content-wise the text is dominated by the embedded accounts of Austerlitz. We as the readers have to investigate further the role of each narrator in relation to the other narrators in the text. Which stories do the narrators tell, what is reported? Who simply mediates and who filters? If Ricœur names *Ulysses* as an extreme case where “it is the reader, almost abandoned by the work, who carries the burden of emplotment” (*Time I 77*), *Austerlitz* can be added as an extreme case where an abandoned reader has to identify the speaker.

Unlike Holocaust survivors, Sebald does not have the mandate of “the victims to tell the story” (Sicher 3). The advantage of “writ[ing] from outside personal experience” lies in the possibility of making use of fiction to “engage in a reality, only a part of which can be put into words” (Sicher 32). Nevertheless the narration always seeks for a personal narrative to justify itself in order to avoid pretentiousness; the indirect quotations and paraphrases have the result that each statement by the narrator or Austerlitz has the support of what someone else told them.<sup>7</sup> This person at the end of the chain has the authority of an expert or eyewitness – and yet, *Austerlitz* does not belong to the genre of testimony. As a text about the memory of the Holocaust rather than the Holocaust itself, it does not have the overambitious aim of depicting the Holocaust and can therefore work through reference. “So entwirft Sebald ein nicht-mimetisches Konzept der Biografik, welches seinen Konstruktcharakter durchgängig durch eine Reihe von Reflexionssignalen anschaulich macht” (Fuchs 122). The reported speech markers have the function of repeatedly making explicit that the story is constructed and that each statement has a specific point of view. The role of the narrator is to visualise the subjective and imaginary character of all memories and reports; an objective reality is merely an illusion (Solheim 319).

What the reported speech markers further disclose is not just the act of narration on several levels, but also the act of listening on these different levels. While the

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<sup>7</sup> Anne Fuchs exemplifies this through an analysis of the intertextual integration of Jean Améry’s work into *Austerlitz* (125).

narrator tells the story to the reader, he is also a listener to Austerlitz. And Austerlitz himself becomes the audience to Věra's stories. The role of the listener is of particular importance in post-Holocaust texts, as Efraim Sicher highlights: "Some survivors did tell their stories, but few were willing to listen and fewer were able to understand a recent reality on the 'other planet' of Auschwitz" (xiv), echoing similar statements by Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, and Ruth Klüger, statements which Aleida Assmann summarises as *Traumatisierung* and *Tabuisierung* (*Der lange Schatten* 99–100). The narrator is therefore a dynamic figure in Sebald's texts with a double function: "In Sebalds Ich-Narrativen fungiert der Erzähler oft als Zuhörer, als Ersatz-Leser, der die Monologe der Protagonisten im Stil eines Thomas Bernhard herauslockt" (Hutchinson, *Die dialektische Imagination* 70–71). As an active listener, he not only perceives what his interlocutor says, but also gives incentives for him to continue with his narration.

Hutchinson supports this with his analysis of Sebald's reading of Giorgio Bassani and his concept of the narrator as *Schutzengel*, "der alles sehen, aber nicht eingreifen kann"; Bassani seems to refer to an omniscient narrator in line with the realist tradition, which differs from the narrative situation in *Austerlitz*, where the narrators and the speakers intervene in each other's personal lives even beyond the role as a listener: on the one hand in the form of a talking cure and on the other hand in a new understanding of history which is tested for the first time when the narrator visits Breendonk (Hutchinson, *Die dialektische Imagination* 72–73). When Austerlitz hands over the keys of his London flat to the narrator (A 410), one is almost tempted to imagine a sequel to *Austerlitz*, in which the narrator goes on a quest for Austerlitz's past and tries to find Věra himself, the house of Austerlitz's foster parents or Andromeda Lodge. Strikingly, the moths also recur at this point. When handing over the keys, Austerlitz reports that there are moths in his flat, adding that he suspects they are coming from the cemetery in his neighbourhood. The moth is thus linked to the liminal space of the graveyard where the living and the dead, present and past meet. "[I]nterfacing with the testimony he listens to with his own fragmentary memories" (Szentivanyi 359), the identities of Austerlitz and the narrator now occupy the same space; they are on equal footing and the narrator is no longer in sole control of the narrative, as all roles seem to be allocated multiple times and therefore become interchangeable.

The fact that the narrator visits Breendonk twice, at the beginning of the novel after the narrator's first encounter with Austerlitz and at the end when Austerlitz leaves to find out more about Marie's and his father's past, not only suggests a cyclical narrative structure; it also shows that Austerlitz's obsession has transferred to the narrator. While Mosbach asks the question of whether the narrator or Austerlitz develops or stagnates (292) – and she does not give an answer to this question –, movement in the form of the transfer of roles should be at the centre of our attention. The open-endedness of the text – Austerlitz embarks on new investigations and the narrator does not actually finish his reading of *Heshel's Kingdom* – suggests that the narrator goes on his very own quest that was initiated through the conversations with Austerlitz. Nicolas Pethes concludes rightly that “[v]ia the active role of the narrator, Sebald's literary account does not present an example of passive ‘postmemory’ (M. Hirsch), but the result of a metalepsis which exchanges cause and effect in the quest for memory” (13). Therefore, “[t]he novel leads us to believe that the question of Austerlitz's identity has been solved, but in fact this depends on our evaluation of the unnamed narrator, who mediates Austerlitz's story” (Ryan, “Fulgurations” 242). They have become reflections of each other.

There is, however, little reason to limit this phenomenon merely to the narrator and Austerlitz. The reader and the narrator encounter Věra only through Austerlitz, so that it is likely that she becomes a platform for Austerlitz's projections and hopes rather than being an individual self. Ideally there would be no singled out position of the eyewitness account (anymore) – most prominently that of Věra – with the effect that contemporary approaches, even by those without direct access to testimony and family narratives, would be equally valid. Austerlitz's search, however, is one-directional and favours stories of the past. He is grateful for having found Věra so easily and only briefly utters his surprise over the coincidence of having found her in the first house he visits in Prague. All her stories are absorbed by Austerlitz. Even though her memory might be as faulty as everyone else's, Austerlitz accepts her account as a master narrative. Like Proust's narrator being happy to have found certainty, the experience is self-sufficient (*Finding Time Again* 176) and all questions of a reasonable explanation remain – in both Proust's and Sebald's texts – unanswered. The ‘truthfulness’ of Austerlitz's subsequent research is duly measured against what Věra told him (see also Mosbach 220). If, as Ryan



argues, Austerlitz and the narrator mirror each other's situation, Věra only serves as a mirror to Austerlitz. Here the relationship is not bilateral but unilateral. This is also reflected in Věra's name. The meaning of the Russian name is 'faith' and coincides with the probably more widely known Latin *verus* for 'true' (Hanks, Hardcastle, and Hodges). There is, indeed, little evidence to assume that Věra's stories represent historical accuracy. Instead, the meaning of her name supports the view that she is a projection of Austerlitz's hopes: he puts his faith in her. The master narrative he so readily accepts has become suspect.

This opens up again not only the question of unreliable narration but also of identification and empathy. The two final sections will therefore disentangle the complex narrative structure and aspects of focalisation in order to draw some conclusions about reliability, as well as about the possible consequences for the text's effects on the reader. This analysis contributes to a postcolonial understanding of *Austerlitz*, as postcolonialism is naturally suspicious of "empathy as an imposition of a privileged perspective" (Keen 349) and challenges the usual discourses surrounding the topic of identification as they are often encountered in the context of the Second World War.

#### RELIABILITY

The 'unmediatedness' mentioned above, is further described by Feehily as "a collapsing between narrative voices" (188–89). The complex relationships and speech acts cannot be separated: "handing over the narrative 'I' to other characters[ ] contribute[s] to the reader losing sight of the narrator's control of how the memory of trauma is released, and by whom" (Feehily 190). Feehily too, like Bassani above, seems to work with the model of the authorial narrator predominant during Realism. Yet to approach Sebald's text we have to rid ourselves of traditional expectations. Mary Griffin Wilson identifies a related problem: not only do the voices of the narrators collapse, within the account of Austerlitz the use of personal pronouns also shows how difficult it is for Austerlitz to keep a certain distance from his own narration. Now the narrating I, remembering I, and the experiencing I seem to merge:

When he describes the figure in the photograph, he refers alternately to "I," "he," "the page boy," and "the Rose Queen's page" and shifts between the present and the past tense. Thus the two figures separate and come together again, in a process that the text does not resolve. (Wilson 63)

Similar phenomena surrounding the use of personal pronouns can also be found in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, as can be seen in chapter 4.2. For Wilson the uncertainty in the case of *Austerlitz* continues to grow: "As the narrator removes this book from his rucksack, it becomes increasingly unclear whether he is in fact distinct from Austerlitz, and we are led to question whether this 'Austerlitz' exists after all" (73). These uncertainties are no enigma for the reader to decipher. As the following example of Austerlitz's encounter at the Paris national library will show, the aim is again to raise doubts about the dominance of a singular perspective by showing the possible flaw inherent in all narratives. In this section I argue that what might be considered an unreliable narrator, since he does not provide the reader with a stable frame for understanding, opens up an, in the widest sense, postcolonial perspective on the topics of identification and trauma.

The question of reliability has come up in the context of the dislocation of the *Lager* at the place of the Paris national library. Austerlitz gets his information from Henri Lemoine; as an employee at the library his position is expected to be one of authority when it comes to the place's past. Similarly to Věra, Lemoine's information is accepted at face value by Austerlitz as a master narrative. Initial doubts, however, become manifest in his conversation with Austerlitz about the "fortschreitende Auflösung unserer Erinnerungsfähigkeit" (A 400). While historical facts might be subject to forgetfulness, Lemoine nevertheless has a sense of temporality: when he is on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor of the library he feels "die Strömung der Zeit um seine Schläfen und seine Stirn" (A 402). Time is again presented as movement; like Ashman at Iver Grove, Lemoine is at a literary and metaphorical abyss. Being able to feel the movement of time, he suffers to a certain degree from vertigo and he too has to step back from the "Sog des Abgrunds" (A 402). Like Austerlitz, Lemoine has difficulties in expressing his experience: he speaks of layers of history below the city, but what is at the centre is the liminal space created through a dynamic concept of time. Therefore it is not of prime importance whether Lemoine was right or wrong about the site of the former *Lager*, since the story about the site of the library and the former *Lager* is just one of many possible instances of this liminal space where past and present, imagined or historically true but always with a higher aim, co-exist.

Ryan also asks "[h]ow much are we to believe of the story Austerlitz tells the nameless narrator" as "[a]ll we know is what Austerlitz tells the mediating narrator,

but much of this is in fact questionable” (“Fulgurations” 241). She leaves it at these questions, well aware that the answers are not hidden in the text and cannot and need not be discovered. The issue of reliability is also secondary, as Austerlitz either refers to the possibility of uncertainty himself or truly believes what he learned or knows. As memory is never just about factual truth but is itself a construct made partly of imaginary elements, the ambivalent character of Austerlitz serves exactly this purpose. The quest for (historical) truthfulness and an objective reality is misleading. The reality that can be found in the novel lies in the mechanisms of memory. *Who* and *what* are secondary questions. Their deviation from the truth serves the purpose of the *how*, as will also be further explored in the fourth chapter.

At the end of the passage, Lemoine and Austerlitz look down into “die jetzt in ihrem Lichterglanz funkelnde Stadt” (A 405), a scene that seemingly parallels the flickering of the moths: orientation can turn into disorientation. Even more strikingly, however, the scene also echoes a passage from Sebald’s *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, where the narrator and his Venetian friend go out onto the open water at night to watch the lights of the Mestre refineries, which are described as “verglimmende[r] Glanz unserer Welt.” The narrator feels like time is slowing down as the two friends watch life and humanity, “[d]as Wunder des aus dem Kohlenstoff entstandenen Lebens,” burn to death. The critique of civilisation and progress is on the one hand represented in the factory and on the other hand symbolised in both texts in the fading lustre (70). The critique of Western literary traditions – in the sense of providing a reliable perspective in any given text – goes hand in hand with the more political *Fortschrittskritik*. We are again presented with the flickering of the light or the moth. The moth’s disorientation owing to the artificial light source – the flame from the factory – mirrors Sebald’s disorienting narrative strategies that show that narrative patterns which depict linear sequences are not suitable to represent the non-chronological and partly fictive workings of memory.

#### READER-RESPONSE

This manipulation of narrative strategies works to a high degree on the level of focalisation or voice. Similarly to the use of reported speech markers, personal pronouns first seem to conflate narrative levels but then actually help the reader to identify the current perspective, keeping the narratives distinct, as each of them is a valuable contribution to the whole. According to Wilson, “spatialized confluations

of past and present” are encountered by all characters and can therefore not be considered “an aftereffect of trauma” (66). Characters like Věra or Marie, however, do not seem to experience these confluences: Věra lives entirely in the past and Marie seems to experience time and space, past and present in the same way most people would and without any signs of coping difficulties. The necessity of distinguishing between different kinds of trauma – most obviously between individual and collective traumas – goes without saying.

As the above mentioned example of Wilson shows, the problems that emerge with the conflation of different narratives of different times are encountered especially by Austerlitz. Personal pronouns are not mixed to the same degree when the reader finds herself with the report of the narrator and the outer frame narrative. In contrast, however, to critics such as Peter Filkins, who looks for true author intention in Sebald’s texts and argues that “[t]he real figure in charge of maintaining Austerlitz’s memory [...] is Sebald himself” (154), I understand the narrator as a mediator for a reader-centred approach: The narrator fulfils an important role, since he is the one to give the narrative coherence: “If the reader finds Austerlitz’s story mostly continuous, that is largely because it is mediated by the narrator; the sustained voice of the narrator makes the repeated backtracking and circling around in chronology less obvious than it might have been otherwise” (Ryan “Sebald’s Encounters” 133). The polyphony in *Austerlitz* is therefore less of a collapsing of voices, but rather a filtering through the narrator – not just of Austerlitz’s accounts but of all other (embedded) narrations (Seitz 148), using the narrator’s own language rather than those of the embedded narrators (see also Fuchs 41). In this mediating function, the narrator in fact does not conflate the different voices but, following García-Moreno, allows rather for “the coeval existence of multiple ‘I’s,’ their stories and trajectories, without, however, blurring their difference” (370). The distance the reader gains from the level of action helps her to recognise these different voices and thus “serves to highlight Austerlitz’s subjective ambiguity” (Wilson 72–73). The movement is now on the part of the reader, moving between the various narrative levels. Although, as has already been shown, the eyewitness account has the greatest authority despite its own flaws, in its reception the subjective, individual approach cannot be ranked hierarchically.

Orality is an important aspect of this individual and personal approach, as well as of the activation of the reader. In the case of *Austerlitz*, the fictional text creates

the illusion of a concrete narrative situation. With reference to Stendhal, Astrid Erll agrees: “Erzählinstanzen vermitteln durch Leseranreden, Erklärungen oder Wertungen das dargestellte, fiktive soziale Milieu mit dem Erfahrungshorizont des Lesers” (“Kollektives Gedächtnis” 261–62). Sebald brings together “different discourses and modes of inquiry” with narrators that are “close yet distant.” His narration “favours permeable borders over solid walls, an idea reinforced by the scarcity of separations between paragraphs” (García-Moreno 370). Movement is important again as well: moving between different narrative levels and different narrators, the text displays a high degree of dynamicity. The text’s deficiencies and failures, so Wilson argues, will be the guarantee of an ongoing process even after the reader closes the book (74). Although the text does not quite succeed in its ambition of levelling all narratives surrounding the traumatic core, its narrative engagement of the reader certainly promotes an anti-hierarchical treatment of the past and its memory.

The engagement of the reader with (post-)Second World War texts has been frequently discussed in the context of identification. Sicher, for example, claims in his work on *The Holocaust Novel* that the novel’s fictionality invites the reader to identify with victims and perpetrators through the imagination (xxi). In the specific case of *Austerlitz*, Feehily argues that the reader can follow Austerlitz’s personal fate, “for whom the reader is encouraged to feel intense identification and sympathy” (189). An emotional engagement of the reader with *Austerlitz* is further supported by Santner and Christiane Weller. Santner describes the reader as being “seduced, in a sense, into participating in the repression that still constrains Austerlitz’s awareness of his own implication in the very ‘network’ to which he is so powerfully drawn” (57). The reader, so Santner suggests, adopts Austerlitz’s position and can, through identification, experience the repression as an (after)effect of the traumatic experience or – in the case of Austerlitz – the traumatic void. Weller even speaks of a re-traumatisation on all narrative levels: “Die Melancholisierung des Zeugen fließt zusammen mit einer Traumatisierung des Zeugen, sei es in der Figur Austerlitz’, des Ich-Erzählers, oder auch im Leser.” She notices here a major difference from the works of Thomas Bernhard as Sebald’s stylistic template: Sebald turned Bernhard’s closed cyclical narrative structure into an open structure through which the reader – again through identification – can know about “das verlorene Objekt, d.h. um den traumatisierenden Charakter seines

Verlustes. Dies erlaubt es dem Leser, teilzuhaben am Phantasma des Ursprungs” (Weller 507).

However, one must be careful with the scope of this possibility for identification. Feehily stresses that *Austerlitz* and other texts can only provide “a parallel for those obliterated personal histories and the wider collective processes of denial and discovery” (181). *Austerlitz* is not representative of a larger group as this would evoke further questions of the definition of such a group: would *Austerlitz* represent all children of the *Kindertransport*? All those who had to flee into exile? All Jewish victims? A postmemory generation? The list of questions is potentially endless and shows that in the case of collective trauma, one cannot stand for the whole. A wide range of conclusions has been drawn in the case of *Austerlitz*: while for example Kathy Behrendt criticises Hirsch’s concept of postmemory through the appropriation objections and consequently dismisses *Austerlitz* as a postmemorial text entirely, Mary Cosgrove describes some form of identification even as a necessity (203). In what then seems to be the middle ground, Filkins concludes that “Sebald remains caught in the same dilemma inherent to issues of representation and appropriation that have always haunted Holocaust fiction” with the consequence that *Austerlitz* can only point at the issue of identification and appropriation but never overcome it (155). Postcolonial theory also points towards the problem of appropriation or mimicry and what Patrick Colm Hogan observes for cultural identity can easily be extended to identity through the experience of collective trauma: despite the best intentions, “one may fail to understand and internalize the other culture, relying for example on stereotypes of that culture, rather than lived interactions” (336). Exemplary work can only mean showing one fraction of the whole, rather than aspiring to be representative.

Other research focuses on empathy as opposed to identification. This still allows for an emotional engagement of the reader, but does not go as far as identification. With reference to Dominick LaCapra, Anne Fuchs defines it as follows: “Anders als die Identifikation ist Empathie hierbei zu verstehen als eine Form des affektiven Bezugs auf den Anderen, die dessen Alterität respektiert und daher etwa darauf verzichtet, mit der Stimme des Anderen zu sprechen” (34). This form of engagement does not aim at unifying narratives but is inclusive: it respects all narratives and forms of engagement with it. Suzanne Keen tries to do justice to a more complex relationship between sender, message, and receiver when she

differentiates between three different forms of strategic empathy, that are either targeted at a specific in-group, out-group, or a readership independent of in- or out-groups. Hogan recognises that these three categories are not quite sufficient for all cases in postcolonial literature, as a mixing of the categories might be necessary to best describe empathy in postcolonial texts, which, so Hogan, “are most likely to involve both audiences, but to keep them to some degree separate” with the independent audience as the least likely option (341–42). I would argue that it is precisely the ability of the expatriate writer to reach out to this independent audience, as they find themselves not only falling between the stools of two cultures, but also forming an access point to the other, to those cultures that are neither home nor host culture. *Austerlitz* is not about a historical event or the fate of Austerlitz’s parents, but rather about each narrator’s/listener’s engagement with what he hears.

A lot of what has been said about identification is certainly a valuable contribution to trauma studies if the point of view is slightly altered towards empathy. This is also how Coscrove’s necessity for identification is to be understood. The debate on identification versus empathy is in recent years often just a terminological one. Axel Dunker’s verdict, “Auschwitz wird durch Empathie, Einfühlung oder Identifikation Unbeteiligter verfehlt” (296), is one example of how empathy, compassion, and identification are used synonymously. There is no reason to deny and reject any emotional response from those born after. Keen observes how “[f]rom the outlook of postcolonial literary theory, critiques of *false* empathy dominate” – which is also the case for post-Second World War studies –, but she then draws the reader’s attention to the social sciences and the notion of ‘failed empathy’, acknowledging the “barriers to empathic responding such as bias, prejudice, diffusion of responsibility, and innate cruelty” (349) with a clear link between empathy and altruism, i.e. moral action in the extra-textual reality (354). In the times of the postmemory generation and the following generation without access to any family narratives, the debate on how to engage with the past has become topical. As long as one does not claim to know the traumatic experience of the victims, living or dead, “imaginative empathy” (Sicher 4) can help to work against a fossilisation of the past. In the context of *Austerlitz*, Muriel Pic agrees that the aim of the text is not to establish “une vérité historique: bien plutôt, il vise à

produire une expérience de remémoration permettant de s’imaginer, grâce à l’empathie, ce qui a eu lieu” (156).

The reader thus has to fulfil a double task: she has to recognise both Sebald’s narrative style of subtle unreliability and its purpose of transcending boundaries between the narration and the reader that were created through a limiting concept of time and Western literary traditions. “Sebald’s ‘subjects’ transgress the border between textual and transtextual realities, between the writer and the written, between the events at stake and their presentation, between the time of the events and the time of the narration” (Eshel, “Against the Power” 81). Sebald seems to lament the fact that our fixed notions of time limit the responses to a collective trauma: trying to dominate the past, we only tighten its grip. Sebald’s argument and style therefore try to deconstruct power relationships by showing that the search for authenticity is not futile as long as it is constantly renegotiated. This process ensures flat as opposed to tall hierarchical structures. Our analysis of its stylistic manifestations started with the narrator as active listener and ended with a shared understanding of empathy in both research about literature of the Second World War and postcolonialism, inviting once more the participation of the active reader.

### **Conclusion**

In *Austerlitz*, the protagonists have several different encounters with time, but they always feel like time has the upper hand. This is especially the case where an attempt has been made to preserve the past or even to impose it on others under the veil of progress, not noticing that they are simply extending their own enslavement to the machinery of time. The Antwerp train station and the Bibliothèque nationale allowed us to see the connection of oppression in Belgian colonialism and National Socialism in a fixed and linear concept of time. More successful seems to be the dynamic form of the treatment of the past in the form of memory. This interaction with the past is represented by the flickering of the moth that Austerlitz tries to trace. At the same time he leaves another trace for the narrator to pick up on. These processes ensure flat hierarchies when it comes to connecting one’s own story to the past and consequently, as in Austerlitz’s conceptualisation of time, they create the idea of a time-space that does not need categories of time. The multitude of narrative levels tries to imitate narratologically the simultaneity developed in Austerlitz’s musings on time in Greenwich. However, in the presence of the master



narrative of the Holocaust by victims and survivors, which might be distorted and flawed itself as Sebald's work shows, it reaches its limits. *All* narrative levels cannot entirely merge. Focusing on memory as a process, there are nevertheless instances where through this engagement with the past, the past can coexist with the present. This happens usually in personal encounters and oral narratives. The many reported speech markers function like a refrain that keeps reminding the reader of the mediated and constructed nature of memory. The text's self-reflexivity maintains a certain distance between speaker and audience, the self and the other in order to prevent identification (Fuchs 32). *Austerlitz* shows that memory is not the search for a historical truth or an objective reality and "enacts a form of witnessing that is itself a process, one which by necessity has no end, decides nothing, and fails to recollect" (Wilson 72). The concerns around identification and false empathy with Second World War victims are shared by a postcolonialist critique. As this chapter has shown, however, memory studies and postcolonialism both highlight the process of constant renegotiation as well as the lack of certainties and fixed identities more broadly. This is not to be understood as a deficiency but rather as a safety mechanism against both the fossilisation of the past and its appropriation by the present.

Austerlitz and the narrator are the two literary figures who pursue this open-ended project, a fact which also explains *Austerlitz's* open ending. Ryan argues rather pessimistically that the narrator stops reading Dan Jacobson's *Heshel's Kingdom* because "he recognizes that the dark shadow cast by the Holocaust puts an end to any hope for – or belief in – flashes of insight" ("Fulgurations" 245). Indeed in the excerpts and summaries of the book we are given by the narrator, there is again an individual at an "Abgrund, in den kein Lichtstahl hinabreicht," below which there is only emptiness and signs of destruction: "auf der einen Seite das selbstverständliche Leben, auf der anderen sein unausdenkbares Gegenteil" (A 416). Astrid Oesmann equally pessimistically believes that "[a]s Austerlitz' father disappeared without a trace, so will Austerlitz himself" (468). The fact, however, that *Austerlitz* ends with yet another embedded story of destruction at the abyss of time – after those of Ashman and Lemoine – might as well point at a continuation: an optimistic reading would see the possibility of the narrator resuming with the reading at a later point. As it was getting late and he needed to catch a train back to Mechelen, he had to pause after the fifteenth chapter. After all, the town of

Mechelen, the final setting of the book, is a place which calls for its own narration: Austerlitz mentions it during his elaborations on fortifications, and the narrator travels through Mechelen to get to Breendronk, but no further details are given. Mechelen is unsurprisingly another place replete with histories: during the Second World War it was a transit camp for deportees to Auschwitz, but before that there was also the so-called Mechelen Incident of January 1940, namely the crash landing of a German officer with secret documents on Germany's invasion plans (Mitcham 276). Mechelen, in other words, represents a final flickering trace of the past – an ideal starting point for another Austerlitzian quest. Interpreting the text's ending as another beginning, the text now aims at involving the reader in this process. The narrator was an active listener to Austerlitz, Austerlitz interacted with Věra's account, and the text itself now reaches out to the active reader: the process continues but cannot yet foresee its completion. Although "retelling" does not lead to the recognition of an "end point" and its "structural function of closure" (Ricoeur, *Time I* 67), the notion of re-telling is nevertheless important as it highlights the purpose of the open ending, namely the – possibly empathic – involvement and contribution of each reader.

### 3. **Recontextualising the Second World War in India: Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay***

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The first chapter showed how post-Second World War literature and postcolonial literature face and tackle similar challenges of temporal and spatial distance from the point of traumatic origin. A comparative approach opens up new ways of understanding and engaging with what might otherwise be seen as a disconnected and closed off past. The second chapter focused on W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, particularly the topic of postcolonialism in this post-Second World War text. This third chapter, in turn, is concerned with post-Partition literature and with the question of how it integrates the Second World War into post-Partition narratives. Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988) is ideally suited for such an undertaking as it brings together the two histories more explicitly than any other work. The Jewish protagonist Hugo Baumgartner leaves his mother in pre-war Berlin and escapes the Holocaust by taking up a new life in India. Ironically, however, history seems to repeat itself in India and Hugo is ultimately unable to escape his fate: during the years of the war, he is interned as an enemy alien and years later, in Bombay, he is robbed and killed by a German stranger, the drug addict Kurt. Thus far, scholars have explored the camp experience of Hugo in India (Capshaw Smith), Venice as an idealised (hybrid) space between East and West (Cheyette), the inclusion of untranslated German nursery rhymes (Ho, Stähler), and most prominently Jewishness in the novel (Cheyette, Guttman, Hesse). My approach will add to these findings by offering a reading through T.S. Eliot's poem "East Coker", of which Desai quotes the opening lines in her epigraph:

In my beginning is my end. In succession  
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,  
Are removed, destroyed, restored ...

The epigraph is sometimes acknowledged in research articles, but without a thorough analysis of poem and novel, the conclusions hardly ever go beyond ascribing a circular nature to the novel. Efraim Sicher and Linda Weinhouse argue than "Eliot gestures [...] towards a Christian redemption that does not exist for Baumgartner or any of the characters in Desai's novel" (24), but they, too, stop short of a structural analysis of the two intertexts. Eliot and Desai share a sense of

destruction and collapse (“removed, destroyed”). However, while Eliot’s poem eventually offers a more optimistic outlook through faith, I will show precisely *how* Desai’s novel lacks this optimism by looking at the dehumanised portrayal of the novel’s characters.

Written and published in 1940 as one of what would eventually become *Four Quartets*, “East Coker” is a commentary on Europe’s second catastrophe in the twentieth century (although the final solution and the systematic killing of the Jewish population were yet to come). “East Coker” also stands in conversation with *The Waste Land*, which puts Desai’s novel not only into the tradition of Second World War writing but also into that of Modernism and the First World War, implying a sense of continuity of traumatic ruptures across both time and space. Reading the novel against the backdrop of Eliot’s poem will reveal a pattern of (post-)Second World War thought, which has thus far not been recognised.<sup>8</sup> Along the lines of “removed, destroyed, restored”, this chapter will firstly show how the traumatic core and the traumatised subject are removed in their multiple displacements: displaced by experiencing the Second World War in India, by experiencing Partition through a German, by disconnecting Baumgartner’s alienation from his Jewishness, and eventually by decentring the Holocaust as a unique and singled out event, suffering is disclosed as the human condition per se. The last point leads to the second subsection of the chapter, which argues that Desai’s novel is very much concerned with what is destroyed: the detailed glimpses into the main character’s suffering point to an irreparable and inescapable loss as a result of being subject to history, as will be shown through the analysis of the motifs of heat and silence. However, in contrast to “East Coker” – and this forms the third subsection – nothing will be restored. Faith and Purgatory are replaced by meaningless dying. The recontextualisation of the Second World War – both through Hugo’s German-Jewish heritage and the inclusion of Eliot’s epigraph – make Desai’s novel first and foremost a text of multidirectional memory and only secondarily one of the partition of India and the Second World War.

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<sup>8</sup> The obvious influence of Indian tradition and thought on Eliot, also an expatriate writer himself, has already been explored elsewhere, see for example Kearns and Bhela. Its immediate impact on “East Coker”, however, is rather limited and will therefore not be dealt with in more detail here.

### 3.1 Removed

The first section will look at the removal of the Holocaust in *Baumgartner's Bombay* in the literal sense of it being re-moved, i.e. moved away from its original context, disclosing how the history of the twentieth century is a global one. In this sense, this chapter continues directly from the first chapter on distance. The local is not isolated from the global but reacts to it. In a conversation with Hugo, his German friend Lotte is the ignorant interlocutor:

“Will soon be war between our countries,” he warned.  
“You still read newspapers?” she pouted at him. “As if war in Europe will have anything to do with us here in Calcutta. Hugo, how silly you are. *Sei doch nicht so blöd.*”  
“How will it not?” he argued. “We are in British territory, and we are German nationals –” (BB 101, italics in the original)

The following 130 pages show in very existential terms that and how Europe and India are connected. The idea of connected histories appears early in the novel in the form of history haunting its subjects as the shadow of the past. With Hugo there is indeed a character who keeps fleeing but his German history catches up with him every time: in Venice, Calcutta, and Bombay.

Because alongside the train was always the shadow of the past, of elsewhere, of what had been and could never be abandoned – an animal in its grey pelt, keeping pace, clinging, refusing to part. An animal like a jackal in the day, a hyena in the night. In the darkness, it continued to chase the train, chase Baumgartner. (BB 89)

The train is one of Hugo's means of transport to Calcutta and what initially triggers joy, quickly shifts to fear. The reader can immediately link the train and its Jewish passenger to deportation images of the Holocaust. The feeling of fear is further strengthened by the wild animals: the jackal and the hyena can keep up with the speed of the train and are as destructive as the train that reaches its destination in a concentration camp.

The most prominent example of German history in the Indian context is the detention camp, which is turned into a microcosm, or “facsimile” as Judie Newman phrases it (42), of Nazi Germany by the Nazi inmates:

On the parade-ground, it was not enough that they had to stand in a line, stand straight and sing “*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles.*” Now the

German flag was being flown, and now the order rang out: Raise your right arm, say “Heil Hitler!” (BB 116, italics in the original)

After fights in the camp, the commander hesitantly separates Nazis and Jewish inmates. This is when one of the Jewish inmates asks “And what shall we call our new home? [...] Auschwitz or Theresienstadt?” (BB 117). Hugo does not comment on the question itself. Although he is annoyed by the dull tasks and duties of the camp, he is also well aware that “captivity had provided him with an escape from the fate of those in Germany, and safety from the anarchy of the world outside” (BB 131). Desai thereby offers another and possibly more critical point of view on the detention camp as a microcosm of Nazi Germany in also highlighting their difference to a certain extent.

#### UNDERREPRESENTATION OR PERIPHERAL SPECIFICITY?

Because Desai creates such a tight connection between the two places, Hugo’s longing to return to the camp runs the risk of romanticising not only the British detention camp in India but also the German concentration camps:

If the war was said to be over in the camp, there was no truce in Calcutta. War raged in its streets every night and when Baumgartner returned to pick his way through them, he blinked uncomprehendingly at what he saw. [...] The city made the internment camp seem privileged, an area of order and comfort. In a panic, he wished he could flee, return to that enclosed world, the neat barracks, the vegetable fields, the fixed hours for baths, meals, lectures, drill, the release from the pressures of the outer world. (BB 162)

Desai establishes this link between camps in Germany and India but in crucial instances does not sufficiently show when and how they are not precisely the same. The British camp was certainly not a holiday retreat either, but the image here of hermit-like and self-sustained life in a place closed off from its environment is not reflective of actual detention-camp experiences in any context.

The example of the sentimental image of the detention camp can be considered a borderline case when it comes to kitsch – a concept that has received much attention after and in relation to art and literature about the Second World War. Ruth Klüger tries but arguably fails to define kitsch; what she offers instead are various descriptions, which nonetheless are helpful to test the passage in question. She calls nostalgia the “Kitsch der Erinnerung, die Verklärung, mit der wir so gern Blut, Schweiß und Kotze der wirklichen Gedächtnisprodukte verpacken” (53),

which corresponds to the example of the nostalgic, sentimental thoughts about the camp. The harmony of kitsch runs the risk of neutralising the themes of death and destruction, as Saul Friedländer observes in *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, but it nonetheless seems relevant in this context (18). The attraction of the camp exceeds the horror and repulsion of the death camps, which are also associated with it (Friedländer 70). Moreover, Klüger states that in kitsch the image or the part one is presented with does not correlate with the whole (65). The novel, however, is always focalised through one of the characters, be they Hugo, Lotte, or the drug addict Kurt, a fact which has also been observed by Bryan Cheyette: “As the book is filtered through Baumgartner’s consciousness, Desai constructs *Baumgartner’s Bombay* around parodic versions of European and Indian history as reflected through each other’s distorting lenses” (“Venetian Spaces” 69). The reader never receives objective or omniscient information. Desai thus makes it clear that all the experiences and ideas are highly subjective and do not present general claims or a singular truth. We might thus choose to interpret this passage merely as Hugo’s confused thoughts during Partition chaos or in fact as a warning by Desai: “Myth is a romanticisation of history, and Germany showed us what a dangerous thing it is. I don’t know if we’re not witnessing that in India now” (Jaggi). In this understanding of the romanticised elements of the text, the reader is part of the process of establishing meaning and transferring it to her extra-textual life. The romanticised German elements in the text are a tool, then, to make a statement about experiences of Indian reality. Following Hermann Broch’s “Bermerkungen zum Problem des Kitsches”, in which he defines kitsch as “das Böse im Wertsystem der Kunst” (307), the novel is an open and ethical system to the reader rather than a closed system of imitation and kitsch (306).

Whilst this interchangeability of India and Germany in the novel can be perceived as problematic, Desai has also had to defend her novel against critics who claimed to observe an underrepresentation of either Jewishness or the postcolonial subject respectively. According to Tony Simoes da Silva, Desai’s novel even “ultimately silences the polysemic nature of Indian society, the multifaceted reality of its being” (75). Arguing that “the reader does not see anyone suffer except Baumgartner and his parents, [which] makes the European outsider appear to be the ultimate victim”, Petra Fachinger agrees with da Silva and concludes that the novel is characterised by an “over-determined conception of the Indian subcontinent as

garish and violent spectacle”, remaining a “construct[ ] of the European gaze” (133; 136). In her article on Hugo’s camp experience, Katharine Capshaw Smith shows how Desai draws on Heinrich Harrer’s *Seven Years in Tibet* and how certain scenes have been changed – for example to the effect of “eliminat[ing] laughter at Indian stereotypes” (154) – while other changes indicate a more problematic integration of Indians and ethnic diversity more generally (150): “Desai erases any sense that Indians are complicit in the confinement, that they exist as guards or camp workers” (154).

While da Silva and others would argue that *Baumgartner’s Bombay* lacks specificity with regard to India and the postcolonial, Anna Guttman objects that it is rather the Jewish identity of the protagonist which is a mere reproduction of stereotypes. She further contends that Hugo’s Jewishness is not explicitly addressed early on in the novel but only when “the events of the Shoah have already begun to overtake him”, extending Hugo’s “inability to engage in any discussion about matters of faith” onto the text as a whole (516). This stereotyping of Jewishness largely concerns the post-Holocaust understanding of the Jew as passive victim (Hesse 883). Such an understanding of Jewishness indeed bears two fundamental risks: firstly that of ascribing a fixed and limited identity to Jewishness and secondly, as Isabelle Hesse notes in her criticism of Michael Rothberg’s approach of multidirectional memory, “a reduction of Jewishness to the Holocaust” (883). Desai tries to disprove such claims by treating her protagonist first and foremost as an individual rather than a representative of the Jews. Desai defends this identity of her protagonist in an interview:

I’ve already had some readers react angrily by saying I’ve simply fed the myth of the passive Jew who walked willingly into the internment camps, a willing victim of Hitlerism. In defense I can only say that Hugo is not a representative of the Jewish race to me but of the human race, of displaced and dispossessed people and tribes all over the world. (Bliss 523)

If, as Hesse says, “[t]he risk of conflating the Jews with the Holocaust can be avoided by situating Jewishness in a historical context” (883), Calcutta and Bombay can act as such a context for Hugo. The fact that Desai draws the reader’s attention to the outsider and the marginal is not only reflected in the character of Hugo but also in the setting: the place in which the Second World War is experienced in the novel is on the periphery. The following implications are quite the opposite of the



stereotype of the Jew as the willing victim: they rather reflect on the multitude of individual experiences of the Second World War and on the fact that it is not solely a European experience. Likewise there are European experiences of the partition of India. The irony of the title, as Stef Craps points out, is that it “suggests ownership, whereas in reality Baumgartner is constantly made to feel that he does not belong there” (113). From this perspective, the title can be reinterpreted as an individualistic statement: the reader is presented with post-Partition Bombay as Hugo understands it – i.e. with “the protagonist’s image, an interior landscape made up of fragments appropriated from the external world” (Ho 102) – together with an equally peripheral experience of the Second World War. It would therefore be too facile to say that “Desai shows just how marginal this European history is in a postcolonial context” (Cheyette, “Venetian Spaces” 70), we would rather have to say ‘in *Hugo*’s postcolonial context.’

Aamir R. Mufti draws the reader’s attention to an even larger frame of reference when he points out that “[o]ne consequence of this displacing of German fascism to colonial soil is the insertion of the British into its problematic”, repositioning fascism into the “horizon of (European) modernity as a whole” (253). In this case, what seems like a detour via Asia, opens doors to peripheral perspectives on Second World War history. Hugo and his experiences in Bombay are thus, to use Hesse’s words, “an ‘episode’ inside the history of marginalization and suffering, which decentres the Holocaust as a unique instance of suffering” (892). Trying to escape a vicious circle of claims of uniqueness and appropriations, the analysis of Desai’s text is another step towards the “change of vision made possible by a new kind of comparative thinking” as demanded by Rothberg (*Multidirectional Memory* 11; 18).

Desai herself can serve as an example for this new vision and new comparative thinking, as she said in an interview that she “could only understand what was happening in Nazi Germany by recalling 1947” (Jaggi). In her novel, one of the cornerstones of this frame for comparison is the setting, as Craps adds to further explain the “ironic ring of the title”: “Baumgartner’s Bombay turns out to be depressingly similar to the Berlin of his childhood. Like Germany, India oppresses its minorities and reduces him to poverty” (113). While it might initially seem ironic from the reader’s point of view, the focalisation through Hugo must be reconsidered: it is Hugo who draws the comparison to Germany and selects the

glimpses he shares with the reader, not the narrator. If Desai could understand Germany only by recalling Partition, Baumgartner is only able to understand Partition through the Second World War and thus irony reverts into logic.

#### METAPHORICAL JEWISHNESS

Hugo's Jewishness fulfils important functions on several levels. As has been widely acknowledged, the colonial and postcolonial setting highlights "parallels between the Jewish experience of discrimination and suffering and the domination of colonized people by European colonial powers" (Hesse 885). Refusing a Eurocentric view of both the Holocaust and Partition, it "trace[s] the similarities of Jewish discrimination and persecution under the Nazis [...] and twentieth century India" (Hesse 885) without conflating them. Leaning on Lyotard's distinction of the "mythical or archetypal figure" of the Jew as opposed to the "real Jews", Sicher and Weinhouse have furthermore drawn attention to a certain tradition of the ambiguous nature of Jewishness (21). They summarise this ambiguity as a reinvention "in the new era of globalisation, postcolonialist and post-modern discourses", in which the Jew is "to be feared as the agent of oppression but at the same time welcomed as the ultimate victim, a role usurped by other ethnic or marginalised groups" (21). Along similar lines, but leaning on Jean-Paul Sartre, Hesse speaks of "ideas of Jewishness", which rely on "a correspondence with 'real' life" but also on "an element of appropriation and adaption" (Hesse 884). This reflects some of the thoughts Desai was preoccupied with when working on her novel and especially the metaphorical Jewishness in her work. Metaphorical and symbolic representation lies at the heart of Indian writing, Desai says:

The fact is that the Indian writer uses characters, as he does features of the landscape, to represent wider truths. He does not see a character – or a tree, an ox, or a hill – as unique and particular; they merely symbolize the larger concepts that he regards as the only fit subjects for art. And so a river represents all rivers, a tree all trees, a lover all lovers – of gods, and men. ("Indian Fiction Today" 208)

Desai thus successfully brings together the metaphorical Jewishness and Indian literary traditions of symbolism. Mufti extends elements of this metaphorical Jewishness by the notion of "Jewishness homelessness", echoing elements of exile and diaspora as explored in chapter one (255). While Guttman claims to see a "disavow[al] of all narrow categories of belonging" and a positioning of both

writers and readers as “globalized subjects” (505), it must be noted that the multidirectionality in Desai’s work, just like in Ghosh’s novel, only works through distinct and clear notions of belonging: the feeling of homelessness does in no instance lead to a cosmopolitan citizen but always only to a severe identity crisis. The novels do not gloss over this crisis, but imposed notions of cosmopolitanism would. It seems more fruitful to follow an ethical approach as has been taken by Mufti, who sees in the

Jewish refugee [...] a figure of rebuke (or at least caution) not only to the Europe of nations whose emergence required its marginalization and then extermination but to all those places and moments in the modern era – Western, non-Western, metropolitan, colonial, postcolonial – in which such dramas of the consolidation of national societies through the marginalization and uprooting of “other” peoples have been played out. (258)

In this way, Hugo’s suffering is not that of the stereotypical Jewish victim, but rather the human condition per se as Desai also confirmed in an interview (Bliss 522); as a Jew he is able to personify this omnipresent human condition of suffering. This echoes further Sartrean thoughts on Jewishness as explored in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, although it must be noted that Hugo does not fit into Sartre’s categories of inauthentic and authentic Jewishness: he neither denies nor chooses his Jewishness. Of particular interest in the context of Desai’s novel is the Jew’s “passion for the universal” through rationalism (Sartre 111). However, albeit this rationalism, the Jew is always “at once strange and familiar” and “himself as others see him” (78); the rationalism does not help him to break free from this determination through the other. “[T]he Jew remains the stranger, the intruder, the unassimilated at the very heart of our society” (83) which leads to an eternal struggle due to his “hopes to become ‘a man,’ nothing but a man, like all other men, by taking in all the thoughts of man and acquiring a human point of view of the universe” (97–98), which can be aligned with Desai’s wish to present a human condition of suffering through a Jewish protagonist.

Hugo is a representative but not the owner of this notion of suffering. Hesse rightly points out that Desai “disrupt[s] the clichéd view of the ‘wandering Jew’ and deconstruct[s] Baumgartner’s ‘otherness’ into specific instances of alienation linked to a particular context” (885), following the already proposed strategy of contextualisation in order to avoid stereotyping and overgeneralisations. Desai

“disconnect[s] his alienation from his Jewishness” (Hesse 887) – from ‘real’ Jews, one must add: as we have seen, Desai strongly builds on Hugo’s metaphorical Jewishness. The ambiguity and ambivalence of the Jewish character does therefore not “silence[ ] the polysemic nature of Indian society”, as argued by da Silva (75), but if we follow Sicher and Weinhouse, who link it “with the figure of the German as a Janus-headed figure of the imminent demise of India’s polyglot, pluralistic society” (23), we see that the novel informs and warns the reader of this silencing rather than enacting it itself.

For this warning statement, the displaced, or removed, Jewish protagonist seems wisely chosen because of his double perspective as an outsider – an experience that Desai, like others before her as seen in the first chapter, ascribes to many writers and artists (Bliss 521). Axel Stähler observes how Hugo’s “eternal outsider status and displacement in both worlds” offers glimpses into these worlds but at the same time also points towards voids with regard to both the Holocaust and India (86), demanding the reader’s participation in similar terms as Sebald. Recalling the writing process, Desai finds that her story has been “too localized”: through the choice of a Jewish protagonist, she wants to “generalize his isolation” which is part of the human condition of suffering (Bliss 522). The specific allows for the bigger, metaphorical statement.

#### “EAST COKER”

The removing and decentring of a dominant narrative of suffering is prefigured in Eliot’s “East Coker.” The ending of the first part of the poem picks up on many central themes, especially the removed position of the speaker:

Dawn points, and another day  
Prepares for heat and silence. Out at sea the dawn wind  
Wrinkles and slides. I am here  
Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning. (EC 47–50)

Dawn and the prospect of the upcoming day refer to repetition and the cyclicity of time – a major concern for Desai. This sets the tone for a more detailed analysis of the Indian notion of time as explored in section 3.3 but also in the context of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* in chapter four. The enjambment at the end of the first line of the quotation above breaks with possible assumptions of the new day as restorative force: the heat and silence it prepares for are recurring motifs of a

destructive past in both Eliot's and Desai's works, as will be explained in more detail below. The repetition is thus connected to history, whose localised emergence echoes "here / Or there, or elsewhere." Again, the sense of stability is disrupted by the enjambment, a recurring technique that, as Harry Blamires argues, Eliot uses throughout the *Four Quartets*, creating an ambiguity and "giving the reader a first-hand experience of the might-have-been" (48).

Eliot's poem must be read together with *The Waste Land*, when he questions the wisdom of the elders in the second part of "East Coker":

And the wisdom of age? Had they deceived us  
Or deceived themselves, the quiet-voiced elders,  
Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit? (EC 75–77)

What Blamires understands as the deception of the old who are close to death (54), I would like to read as a reference to WWI and the wisdom that could have been gained in its aftermath. After the downfall of Europe with World War I, the hoped for resurrection and progress through the propriety and the control of desires as called for in *The Waste Land* did not set in.

*Damyata*: The boat responded  
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar  
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded  
Gaily, when invited, beating obedient  
To controlling hands (l. 419–423)

The calm sea in *The Waste Land* has become stormy; the strong and clear direction has turned into the boat being shoved around by the wind; the lack of guidance and unwillingness to follow the expert result in an overall loss of orientation and good spirit. The strategy failed and the hoped-for experts are now the "quiet-voiced elders" with their "receipt for deceit." Witnessing the development of a second catastrophe in twentieth century Europe, the disillusioned Eliot can only testify to history repeating itself, not anticipating that the worst in fact still lies ahead.

The serenity only a deliberate hebetude,  
The wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets  
Useless in the darkness into which they peered  
Or from which they turned their eyes. There is, it seems to us,  
At best, only a limited value  
In the knowledge derived from experience. (EC 78–83)

Hebetude refers on the one hand to trauma's latency and on the other hand also to an unnecessarily prolonged silence. Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich criticised the latter in relation to Germany in the 1960s, yet similar patterns have also emerged in the context of the partition of India. Adding darkness to the list of motifs which are also relevant for Desai's novel, it here represents both the future, "into which they peered" but which they were not able to discern, and the past "from which they turned their eyes." The elders are thus at a juncture. They did not make use of their location of multidirectionality, the lamentation over which prompts the reader to take over this task of removing and reconnecting these and further histories. Eliot elaborates on the reason for the "limited value" of the elders' knowledge from experience:

The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,  
For the pattern is new in every moment  
And every moment is a new and shocking  
Valuation of all we have been. (EC 84–87)

He criticises the establishment of traditions and norms, which are imposed upon rather than shaped by its subjects. In this sense they falsify conclusions drawn. Emphasis is put on the newness of every moment through the inverted word order of "new" and "every moment." Eliot includes the reader in this almost cathartic experience of the new moment; the "[v]aluation" has to be one attained through shock, through *eleos* and *phobos*. The newness of the moment destroys the hierarchies of normativity, which would play out the norm, or the experience of knowledge, against the marginal and peripheral, here the new moment. Newness can thus be brought together with new ways of thinking that also already include the postcolonial. Eliot opens up the space for an exploration of different schools of thought together and of the transcultural perspective on traumatic pasts: "East Coker" itself is such a juncture mentioned above, looking into the past to WWI and *The Waste Land* and at the same time embracing the future by being picked up by Desai's novel; "East Coker" itself is a tool for reading *Baumgartner's Bombay* as an example of Rothberg's multidirectional memory, which is concerned with "social actors bring[ing] multiple traumatic pasts into a heterogeneous and changing post-World War II present" (*Multidirectional Memory* 4).

Part three of "East Coker" summarises this imperative of continuously seeking new grounds for comparison:

In order to arrive at what you are not  
You must go through the way in which you are not.  
And what you do not know is the only thing you know  
And what you own is what you do not own  
And where you are is where you are not. (142–146)

Eliot foregrounds the importance of movement – a motif we have already encountered in the previous chapter on Sebald’s *Austerlitz*. Equally notable is the relevance of dispossession (“In order to possess what you do not possess / You must go by the way of dispossession”, EC 140–141), echoing Theodor W. Adorno’s thoughts on property in chapter one. Eliot now suggests a “way of ignorance”, of leaving presuppositions behind and being able to follow new directions. In the spirit of multidirectionality, then, this section has started by showing how *Baumgartner’s Bombay* ventures into these new directions by recontextualising the impact of the Second World War in Partition India. Its literal removal and displacement is a reaction to and prevention of the risk of stereotypical underrepresentation and romanticisations. This works by drawing the readers’ attention to the periphery. At the same time, the Indian tradition of writing through motifs and metaphors shows that the protagonist is a placeholder for a suffering humanity, where the Holocaust is one of many entries on the list of its causes. Removed, the epigraph sets the tone for themes, motifs, and discourses addressed in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*. The following sections will show how the tone is equally set for ‘destruction’ but considerably deviates from ‘restoration.’

### 3.2 Destroyed

“East Coker” forcefully opens with the repeated cycle of destruction and death; houses are rebuilt only to be removed and destroyed again. The earth, as Eliot envisaged it, is an accumulation of the bones and ashes of who and what has been there before (“ashes to the earth / Which is already flesh, fur and faeces”, EC 6–7). The past fuels the fire for the wedding celebration (“old timber to new fires”, EC 5), which can be considered “a symbol of universal harmony” (Blamires 44), but the fire will eventually also put an end to the very same celebration. “The time of the seasons and the constellations” of part I (EC 42) is revealed as “constellated wars” of technologies in part II (EC 60); “The time of milking and the time of harvest” (EC 43) does not refer to the farming of crops but rather to human cannon

fodder, implying that the “coupling of man and woman” (EC 44) has the sole purpose of producing war machinery. The domesticated fire thus inevitably brings “The world to that destructive fire / Which burns before the ice-cap reigns” (EC 66–67). This subchapter demonstrates how this sense of destruction is conveyed in *Baumgartner’s Bombay* through the motif of heat, which must be understood in conjunction with Eliot’s fire. Both authors find it difficult to express themselves in the face of destruction and trauma as will be shown in the second half of this section. Destruction and annihilation, as the reader learns from reading Desai through Eliot, is thus experienced as inevitable and non-communicable. This corresponds with observations from texts in other chapters of this thesis.

#### HEAT

The motif of fire in Eliot’s poem connects the heat in *Baumgartner’s Bombay* with images of the extermination of the Jews in crematoria during the Second World War. Hugo suffers throughout the novel because of the heat, starting with his arrival in India: he is overwhelmed by “an invasion of light such as he had never known could exist”, comparing the heat to “boiling oil tipped out of a cauldron onto their heads, running down their necks and into their collars and shirts” (BB 83). This experience of extreme heat and the sun as perpetrator or weapon is repeated several times throughout the novel. Leaving the protective shade of the restaurant where he had lunched with Chimanlal, Hugo is confronted again with the “white heat” (BB 88), which violently intrudes into Hugo’s personal sphere: “Baumgartner felt his world not merely opening up but torn open, hacked open, to the Eastern light” (BB 88). Continuing his journey to Calcutta by train, Hugo starts feeling feverish due to the sun. When he looks out one of the windows, he can only see the dryness of the land: “The coconut trees that stood out like blackened spokes and bore no fruit, nothing, just some dead, dry leaves, fan-shaped, like broken umbrellas” (BB 89). The trees look like they are the remains of a fire. The broken umbrella does not offer shadowy relief and reminds the reader of the rain that does not set in. Being a literal waste land, the scenery is hostile towards life. Hugo, still in his early years in India, experiences the heat as “an assault, a violence” and for the first time links it to death when “he felt himself a great hunk of red meat, cooking in his own juices” (BB 93).



His meetings with Lotte are also characterised by a lethargy due to the heat. The conversations and movements of both are ponderous. The thought of dancing makes her exclaim “In this bloody heat and in this bloody graveyard? What a joke” (BB 68), leaving it unclear if the graveyard is the Café de Paris or the waste land in India. Having had some gin, Hugo feels “awful” and “stupid” in the heat: he stumbles, clumsily fumbles with the door locks, “rattled them helplessly, frightenedly, in a panic, wanting to get out” (BB 137). His desperate need for fresh air reminds the reader of the protagonist in Franz Kafka’s *Prozess*, who feels a similar nausea but ultimately is equally incapable of escaping death. Hugo’s moment of relief in the shady staircase, however, is brief: “the heat struck at him like twin knives. It was cruel” (BB 137). Leaving the safety of the house, Hugo is metaphorically stabbed by the heat which he has to endure if he wants to make it back to his own apartment in good time.

A scene at a small train station then foreshadows Hugo’s death even more explicitly. Having to wait several hours for his next train as part of a business trip, Hugo wonders how to pass the time “on a blazing morning with the sun pouring” (BB 186). He walks towards some hills and finds himself surrounded by “nothing but this red dust, this black stone, sun and barren space”, echoing again previous notions of India as a waste land (BB 187). Entering what appears to be E.M. Forster’s cave in *A Passage to India*, Hugo still does not find relief from the sun and the heat: “Although it was so well sealed from the heat of the sun, it was not cool either; on the contrary, the heat seemed to thicken and congeal here, like spilt blood, into a dark clot” (BB 187–88). The passage furthermore shows how darkness and light are not opposites but in fact part of the same oppressive environment Hugo, and as Desai would argue every human being, finds himself in.

In the killing scene, Kurt enters Hugo’s apartment like the latter entered the cave, a space of silence and darkness with only dusky shapes to be discerned. After having stabbed Hugo, he sees “that pale mound of yellow tallow was oozing with something dark, liquid” (BB 220). The men who find the corpse also notice “the filthy black stuff that was spilt everywhere” (BB 223). It is only then that the liquid is identified as blood, already pointing to the fact that Hugo has been rid of his identity as a human being. Through the descriptions and word choice for the heat in the cave and Hugo’s blood, Desai establishes a link between the two scenes. When Hugo wonders in the cave “Then what was it that was so stealthily watching

him, breathing so malignly down his neck, raising the small hairs on his back as if he were faced with danger, with death?” (BB 190), he does not recognise the unknown as death – he only compares it to it. In the killing scene, the stealthy watcher is Kurt. Heat thus triggers Hugo’s suffering and is linked to his death in the image of the dark blood, thickened by the heat.

#### THE INARTICULATE

The two scenes of the cave and the murder are also connected through silence, which has the double meaning of impatience for an answer and the impossibility of articulation. Receiving no replies to his letters from his mother when he is in the camp, Hugo “was left listening, intently, trying to catch sounds in the air, receive answers. Anything but not this silence – this whining, humming silence that seemed to come from the sky” (BB 112). Paradoxically, silence is portrayed as something that can be heard. Being in the air which he breathes, it is also part of the oppressive environment which one cannot escape. However, while Mrs Moore and Adela in Forster’s *A Passage to India* hear an echo in the cave which can be understood as leading to an epiphany, Hugo “heard nothing” (BB 189). It is the silence, not Forster’s “boum”, which “thundered in his ears” and he is “listening to its beat for a long time” (BB 189). Like in Forster’s novel, Hugo senses a presence in the cave. Considering that he hears his own bones creak when he turns his head, the beat he hears is likely to be his own heartbeat in the presence of death. Mrs Moore and Adela heard an answer in the echo; for Hugo, who is still waiting for a reply, “there was no one to tell him” (BB 189). Newman concludes from the passage that “[w]ithout minimising the real horrors of the past, Desai emphasises the need not to be complicit with those forces that would erase historical truth, reducing events to myth, fantasy or silence” (45). If it is necessary to “maintain[ ] its silence and omission” (Newman 45), we are led back to the only way trauma literature can be productive without appropriation: by pointing at the gap, at what is not said. It therefore seems apt that the novel opens and closes on the notion of silence. After Hugo’s murder, Jagu and the watchman, who have both found the body, sit next to each other in silence, feeling guilty: “[t]hey waited like criminals in prison for the gaoler” (BB 223), leading the reader back to one of the first scenes of the camp, where Jews and Aryans “looked at each other covertly”: “The looks they had exchanged had been the blades of knives slid quickly and quietly between the ribs,

with the silence of guilt” (BB 21). It also leads the reader back to Hugo’s feeling of survivor’s guilt, “his shame at being alive, fed, sheltered, privileged” (BB 207), the knives and guilt recalling Kafka’s *Prozess* again: “K. wusste jetzt genau, dass es seine Pflicht gewesen wäre, das Messer als es von Hand zu Hand über ihm schwebte, selbst zu fassen und sich einzubohren”, admitting his guilt and leaving shame even after his death: “es war, als sollte die Scham ihn überleben” (166). Silence is thus the natural response to overwhelming experiences in Desai’s novel.

In the last section of “East Coker”, Eliot highlights, like others before him, the inadequacy of language to convey meaning. To him, language can only be used to describe the past (“the thing one no longer has to say”, EC 177) and is as “shabby equipment always deteriorating / In the general mess of imprecision of feeling” (EC 180–81). The “new beginning” is “a raid on the inarticulate” (EC 179) and merely “a different kind of failure” (EC 175). This is reflected in Hugo’s discomfort with all the languages he is exposed to during his life: be it German, Yiddish, English, or one of the many Indian languages. When he arrives in India, Hugo finds it difficult to express himself in English, “dragging it off his tongue with a reluctance bordering on paralysis” (BB 86). This will remind the reader of Austerlitz’s slow reading experience of H.G. Adler’s book due to his problems with the German language, as will be further outlined in the following chapter. Hugo had the ambition of building

a new language to suit these new conditions – German no longer sufficed, and English was elusive. [...] what was this language he was wrestling out of the air, wrenching around to his own purposes? He suspected it was not Indian, but India’s, the India he was marking out for himself. (BB 92)

Hugo ascribes a characteristic to India which centres around its (linguistic) plurality. India’s particularity is not a singular language but one consisting of fragments from a multitude of languages. However, this does not lead to confidence in difference and individuality, but rather to a feeling of estrangement and uncertainty, also with regard to the language Hugo is supposed to use in certain contexts after he has lived in the country for fifty years (BB 6).

This conflict, or as Eliot would call it “kind of failure”, is not resolved in the novel. Probably sent from a concentration camp and censored by Nazi officials, the letters and cards Hugo was sent by his mother are void of any meaning which could have aptly reflected her situation. As Newman notes, however, the letters’

“material reality is crushingly significant, bearing witness to the worst horrors of recent history” (44). Looking at these letters and cards on what will be his last evening, Hugo gives up, crushed by their ungraspable significance, and turns off the light but

in the dark [he] could still see the script, spidery and fine. Gradually the words ran into each other, became garbled. They made no sense. Nothing made sense. Germany there, India here – India there, Germany here. Impossible to capture, to hold, to read them, make sense of them. They all fell away from him, into an abyss. [...] He stood watching as they fell and floated, floated and fell, till they drifted out of sight, silently, and he was left on the edge, clutching his pyjamas, straining to look. But there was nothing to look at, it was all gone, and he shut his eyes to receive the darkness that flooded in, poured in and filled the vacuum with the thick black ink of oblivion, of *Nacht und Nebel*.” (BB 215–16)

Hugo recognises the arbitrariness of location and distance, coming to a conclusion of the absurd where nothingness replaces all purpose and meaning. This can be extended to the post-Second World War gaze on Partition and vice versa, implying that neither the West nor its major historical trauma are superior to the experiences in India, taking, as Rothberg postulates, “dissimilarity for granted, since no two events are ever alike” (*Multidirectional Memory* 18). Hugo, standing at the metaphorical abyss, will be joined by *Austerlitz*’s Ashman and Henri Lemoine, who also find themselves at the abyss of time, frustrated because they cannot bring back the past. With garbled words and meaninglessness, Hugo faces nothingness in a similar way as he did in the cave. As a dark liquid, the thick black ink is reminiscent of the heat in the cave as well as of his blood after having been killed – the belated enactment of the *Nacht- und Nebel-Erlass* of 7 December 1941.

What Hugo lost is literally picked up again by his lover and friend Lotte who arrives at the scene after his death, saving the letters and cards. What chronologically is the end of the plot, is the opening pages of the book. This also shows that language, following Eliot again, “Is a wholly new start” albeit as a “kind of failure.” Lotte understands the language and the lack of actual content and tries to safeguard herself against the absent but nevertheless overwhelming content: “Lotte pressed her fingers to her lips, to her eyes, to her ears, trying to prevent those words, that language from entering her, invading her” (BB 4). Language can thus be seen not only as failure but also as an external force subjugating its user: shifting the stress from the inarticulate to the effects of this inarticulation, Eliot’s reader is

left with the “raid”, deterioration, and a “mess” of history, supporting Desai’s view of “history as something that happens in spite of individuals; it gathers momentum and sweeps them away. What they choose to pick up when they flee, what they lose and what they take – that makes history real to me” (Jaggi). A reading of language in *Baumgartner’s Bombay* against the backdrop of “East Coker” reveals how the inadequacy of language is not only a symptom of the underlying trauma but is also complicit in the violence and part of the trauma of history itself. The silence of the cave links these issues to the motif of fire and heat in both texts, revealing them, too, as perpetrators, not least through the evocation of Holocaust crematoria.

### 3.3 Not Restored

Eliot’s cyclical time has already been mentioned above. Linking beginning and end, he raises the hopes for restoration; nevertheless, the purpose of restoration is its own repeated destruction. The cyclicity is also taken up in the wedding dance, which moves in circles around the fire: its rhythm stresses the passing of time but also the repetition of the same sequence of steps onto the ground, which is the earth of the dead. The wedding is in fact a celebration of the past and the “Mirth of those long since under earth” (EC 38). Desai has expressed much interest in this cyclicity in Eliot’s understanding of time, connecting it to India: “Eliot’s concept of time interests me so much. I think the circular concept of time is very, very Indian – the conviction that life doesn’t come to an end, merely one episode does and then there are other episodes to follow” (Bliss 530). The particularities of the Indian notion of time will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter. Nevertheless we can already trace an understanding of time here which is not a repetition of the same but of similar cycles: The *yugas*, which form the *mahayuga*, are smaller cycles, different in nature and length, as Romila Thapar has shown (31–32). Both Eliot and Desai subvert chronology, which Desai attributes to particularly Indian styles: “To the Indian, the linear development of Western thought is strange and unfamiliar – even unnecessary. The Indian reader, like the Indian philosopher, sees time as a cycle, a wheel, ever turning, ever changing – not as a sequence of events, beginning at the beginning and ending with the climax” (“Indian Fiction Today” 210). She names Raja Roy and *Kanthapura* as a prime example for this cyclical-but-different style and traces models back to the “Puranas, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata – where the reader, or more commonly the listener, would

take up the thread at any point, read or listen for a while, drift away, and then return for another episode” (210). What Eliot then explicitly formulates as “In my beginning is my end”, and the inversion of the statement in the very last line, exemplifies this cyclical-but-different understanding of time.

In *Baumgartner's Bombay*, it is performed most prominently by Lotte and her reading of the letters and cards. In Hugo's, and before him his mother's, end is Lotte's beginning. These circles, however, as Thapar notes, are gradually declining and move towards destruction and “degeneration characteristic of the present Kali age” (32). Lotte's cycle can thus not be seen as a resolution, but as another step down; as Desai also notes: “Baumgartner will not rise again from the ashes, but the struggle of good and evil will always manifest itself again and again” (Bliss 530). Asked if evil would always have the upper hand, Desai confirms “Yes, I suppose it does always” (Bliss 530). Views like Mufti's, according to which the circularity is “a condition that has not yet been worked through and therefore has not yet been overcome, rather than a linear one fated inexorably toward decline” (Mufti 251), can now no longer be sustained. Leaving the internment camp and being confronted with pre-Partition violence, Hugo, too, realises that there is no hope:

The Calcutta he lived in now – [...] that had been used and drained by the war and war profiteers and now prepared for the great partition – was the proper setting for his mourning. The Calcutta of the black back streets, the steaming rubbish tips, the scarred tenements, its hunger, its squalor, its desolation. The hopelessness of it seemed right to Baumgartner; this was how the world ended, there was no other ending. (BB 165–166)

The battle of good and evil takes place within the cycle. It is only by stepping back and looking at the macro-level that one can see that there is no endless repetition of the same but rather an endless repetition of events leading towards decline. Following Desai's views, evil has already won the war.

The violence in the novel is therefore tragically linked to a necessary frailty of the characters (Bliss 531). The viciousness of some of the characters is then also a “symbol[ ] for evil in the world”, as Desai explains; “They make one aware of the presence of evil everywhere and for the purposes of fiction they take the form of characters” (Bliss 531). For this reason, Desai continues, Hugo was not able to escape death by going to India: it was unavoidable that it would haunt him and catch up with him there. By stressing that the location is random and evil is everywhere,

Desai also wants to make a point about the Holocaust: “In the Holocaust, it was the scale that was unprecedented and appalling – the violence was neither new nor unique” (Bliss 531). Cheyette questions Desai’s claims of a universal experience and objects to the fact that “[i]n contrast to her many proclamations that Baumgartner represented suffering humanity as a whole, Desai’s novel complicates such universalizing by revealing just how difficult and painful it was for her traumatized protagonist to make connections with others” (*Diasporas* 255). In this reading, Cheyette seems to misperceive slightly the nature of the human condition of suffering and the many facets attached to it. Hugo’s inability to connect to his environment illustrates the suffering; it does not try to resolve it. Desai’s novel does not depict a utopia of universal harmony, rather she suggests that humans suffer because of its absence. In order to convey a sense of ethics and morality, a text and its characters do not have to be prototypes of ethical behaviour themselves, but, as Craps rightly points out, they must “call[ ] upon the reader to transcend the racial and other divisions of camp-thinking” (123). Hugo is not an example of righteousness but of suffering and flawedness. The difficulty and painfulness of connecting to others is therefore part of Desai’s sense of decline. The reader is given no relief. This section will therefore trace how Eliot’s redemption is replaced with continuous destruction. It reaches its peak in Desai’s novel wherever hope is deceived, for example through the inclusion of nursery rhymes, and when humans are shown to be dehumanised and even animalistic.

#### REDEMPTION VERSUS CONTINUITY

Sicher and Weinhouse rightly point out that “East Coker” “gestures there towards a Christian redemption that does not exist for Baumgartner or any of the characters in Desai’s novel” (24). Considering that Desai had originally intended to use a different excerpt from the *Four Quartets* for the epigraph, her change highlights the importance of this contrast. As Stähler discovered, the following passage from “The Dry Salvages” was originally supposed to be printed before her text: “There is no end, but addition: the trailing / consequence of further days and hours...” (“The Dry Salvages” 55–56). Similar to “East Coker”, “The Dry Salvages” would have been able to show how the novel, too, conveys the idea of eternal “Years of living among the breakage” (“The Dry Salvages” 58) in “a drifting boat with a slow leakage” (“The Dry Salvages” 64). The excerpt from “East Coker”, however, functions more

effectively because it highlights what is denied in *Baumgartner's Bombay*: redemption or hope. Sicher and Weinhouse refer to a section in part four of "East Coker" which evokes images of the Holy Communion, although Eliot raises the issue of a way out of this destructive cycle earlier in the poem:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,  
For love would be love for the wrong thing; there is yet faith  
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting. (EC 123–126)

Faith is the power of restoration. It reminds the reader of the repression of improper desire and the controlled movement of the boat in *The Waste Land*, which he now complements with instructions on religion. It demands patience and a surrender to the darkness "Which shall be the darkness of God" (EC 113). The old men have to navigate "Through the dark cold and the empty desolation" (EC 207) to attain a "deeper communion" (EC 206). These final lines of "East Coker" thereby show how the end, understood as the darkness of God, can be seen as a way towards a new beginning.

Purgatory is another stage of suffering in the process for purification and it adds a paradoxical warm-cold relationship to the light and darkness dichotomy attached to religion and faith (see also Blamires 43–44).

If to be warmed, then I must freeze  
And quake in frigid purgatorial fires  
Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars. (EC 164–66)

The reader then recognises the fire, made of timber from the old houses, the "electric heat", which oozes out a "warm haze" and "sultry light" (EC 19–20), the fire at the wedding dances, the destructive fire of war, and the monsters' "fancy lights" (EC 102) which all lead up to these purgatorial fires. If Eliot's poem presents an equally pessimistic verdict on the status quo of the human race as *The Waste Land*, the suffering can be understood as the suffering in Purgatory. Humanity is thus simultaneously suffering and in the process of restoration.

As has been shown, Eliot made use of a circular notion of time, which he also stresses again in the final part of the poem, echoing the opening lines: "There is only the fight to recover what has been lost / And found and lost again and again" (EC 186–87). This fight is not, however, a doomed Sisyphean task: "For us, there



is only the trying. The rest is not our business” (EC 189). Opening the line with “for us”, he integrates the reader but at the same time implies that there is someone or something outside this alliance, beyond the human: God, who can break this cycle of repetition and trying. In the same line, Eliot also warns of hubris, of thinking one can achieve what God is meant to do. In this sense humanity is indeed on trial, as emphasised by Blamires (74). This glimpse of hope through faith also forms the climax of the poem at the end of section two: “The only wisdom we can hope to acquire / Is the wisdom of humility” (EC 107–08). Desai’s novel is exemplary of this continuous loss and echoes Eliot’s poem accordingly in many instances. “East Coker” can be read as an intertext which deviates, however, in all instances of hope, religion, and optimism.

*Baumgartner’s Bombay* replaces restoration with the continuity of removal and destruction. Desai had first considered another ending to the novel, in which Hugo is killed by the beggar who lived outside his apartment. To her there has never been the question of a happier ending; rather, Desai describes how she had to have death catch up with Hugo eventually, as “it seemed right and justified in the Greek sense” (Desai quoted in Craps 109). Reading *Baumgartner’s Bombay* as a tragedy, the protagonist with his tragic flaw cannot escape the inevitable death. The repetition of history in the killing of the Jew illustrates the “continuity between contemporary Germany and the Holocaust” and raises “criticism of contemporary Germany’s handling of its wartime past” (Craps 109). The Holocaust as “an unresolved history” (Craps 109) has also been addressed by Mufti, who describes the relationship between the novel and the Holocaust as metonymic:

This series connecting the slumped over blonde body in Bombay to Auschwitz and Treblinka is a metonymic one; the conceptions between its terms are substantive and not merely metaphorical. They point, in other words, to a continuity between contemporary Europe and that earlier genocide. (250)

The novel thus relies on the physical presence of representatives of each historical trauma in the narrative, through whom the metonymic relationship can be established. The mere repetition of motifs and symbols associated with the Holocaust would not be sufficient for Desai’s text to create these links of what is eventually an example of multidirectional memory through metonymy. Elaine Y. Ho does not see Kurt as a “direct successor of the Nazi past, although the novel

emphasizes his Aryan [...] lineage”, but she nevertheless leaves space for the continued impact of National Socialism on him when she describes him instead “as the symbolic detritus of the historical tide that moulded and remoulded German culture before and after the war” (104). Mufti, furthermore, reads Kurt’s escape as “a telling comment on the claim to progress in post-war Europe and the evasion of historical responsibility” (251).

Even if the novel is understood on a more abstract level, the notion of the continuity of destruction remains. Cheyette argues for a sense of restoration in Desai’s novel, which “is not a form of religious redemption, as it was for Eliot, but is instead a means of restoring a sense of reality beneath a myriad of false images” (“Venetian Spaces” 70). Cheyette supports his claim by giving the example of the Taj Hotel in Bombay: it is only here, in the wrong Taj Hotel, that “he begin[s] to understand that the vastness of India can not be reduced to his mother’s orientalist fantasies” (70). If this were indeed a restoration of a sense of reality, it would bring about a sense of orientation for Hugo. However, since he remains the stranger in relation to all places, distant or close, this restoration, too, is eventually only the re-manifestation of the opposite: of uncertainty rather than knowing and thus of an epistemological destruction.

#### THE DECEIT OF HOPE

That which might alleviate this universal suffering eventually turns out to be deception itself. Memories as well as the German language “are sweet and painful at the same time”, as Stähler has shown (80). Their deceit is foreshadowed in “East Coker” if we apply what is said about poetry to expression more generally: “The poetry does not matter. / It was not (to start again) what one had expected” (EC 71–72). In the case of Desai’s novel, the German language is most prominent in the brief excerpts from German nursery rhymes. This topic has been addressed to some extent by most scholars working on the novel; rarely, however, in sufficient depth: Cheyette, for example, limits his elaborations on the topic to putting the songs into the context of untranslatability and disconnectedness from the environment (*Diasporas* 251). Fachinger concludes from the fact that the German sections remained untranslated that “Desai had a European readership in mind” and “privilege[d] the European point of view” more generally (133). Robert Stockhammer counters such views by arguing that Desai’s integration of

untranslated German endearments and food related words are equally unknown to the average English speaking reader as those of a novel set in Rhodesia, but all these German or Rhodesian foods “schmecken ihm [dem Leser], ohne dass er wüsste, worum es sich dabei eigentlich handelt” (158). The aim is then not a literal understanding but a sensual one. However, Stockhammer considers all songs collectively when he – without a close reading of individual passages – states that “[d]as poetische Deutsch steht überwiegend für dasjenige des ‘guten’ Deutschland” (157). Similarly, da Silva refers to a statement by Desai, according to which “the German language is used to convey moments of extreme significance in the main character’s childhood” (da Silva 67), but he does not actually show what the significance exactly is. In half a sentence, Sicher and Weinhouse acknowledge that “the German nursery rhymes had evoked the memory of the false security of his early boyhood” without tracing how this effect came about (24). Ho goes a step further by revealing a number of different nuances which can be found below the surface of these nursery rhymes. While some are considered a “parodic gloss”, others “insinuate the dark side of childhood experience” and are even, very much in the spirit of this chapter, a “menacing warning of death” (98; 105). Stähler, too, dedicates thorough attention to the nature of the connection between the songs and their frame. He illustrates how “Backe, backe Kuchen” (BB 127), which is sung by the children of the missionary Bruckner’s wife of the other side of the camp fence, evokes the Holocaust through the colour yellow and the killing of the Jews through the image of the oven (Stähler 84). While the camp to a certain degree serves as a refuge to Hugo and a “site for a substitute repatriation” (Mufti 254), it is also a “regression into his childhood” (Stähler 84); the song, however, reveals it as “a very treacherous kind of comfort” and a “false security of an imagined childhood” which “coincides with his mother’s death and the harsh reality of the Holocaust in Germany”, as Stähler further suggests (84).

“O du lieber Augustin” (BB 32), then, refers to the failed undertaking of Hugo as a boy to buy butter, but the reader, who is familiar with the whole novel, will recognise a foretelling of the impoverishment of both Hugo’s family in Berlin and of himself in Bombay, where he literally lives in dirt, as those visiting him remark. The song is printed without the contextualisation of who sings it. We can only assume that it functions here as a soothing bedtime song, sung by his mother, but it might just as well be a playful interjection by the narrator. In any case, the

alleviating effect disappears in the face of elements foreshadowing the family's actual decay and the death of Hugo's father, where the lines are repeated (BB 49). "Hänschen klein" is introduced as "the tactics for surviving" (BB 38), pointing towards the expulsion of the Jews and the theme of the Jewish diaspora more broadly. This reaches its peak in "Eija, Popeija" (BB 42), which plays with the symbolism of shoes standing for Jewish deaths during the Holocaust. When the Gentleman from Hamburg tries to persuade Hugo's parents to sell the company, he puts Hugo's mother under pressure, his voice booming through the rooms. The scene is followed by four lines from "Fuchs, du hast die Gans gestohlen", again uncontextualised as to who is singing (BB 44). Taking the previous scene into consideration, however, we have to see that the hunter is already there as the Gentleman from Hamburg, threatening, almost as if he had a "Schiessgewehr [sic]." His mother becomes the sick "Haslein [sic] in der Grube" who can no longer jump, sending Hugo to India but herself staying behind in resignation (BB 53). Almost none of the nursery rhymes can fulfil their original function anymore. They are situated in the novel in such a way that the sense of safety they are supposed to convey in other contexts is now distorted through an ironic correspondence between the novel and the embedded nursery rhyme. While Eliot claims that "to be restored, our sickness must grow worse" (EC 156), for Desai there is only the worsening sickness. Eliot's circularity encapsulates hope through faith as part of the cycle, but Desai's cycle is only repeated destruction with all glimpses of hope revealed to be mere deceptions.

The "purgatorial fires" of "East Coker" are replaced in *Baumgartner's Bombay* by references to cremations: the motif of fire then exceeds the representation of suffering as explored above and culminates in moments of death, not the least as observed in the example of the oven in "Backe, backe Kuchen." Hugo attends the cremation of his business partner Chimanlal but even in this shared moment of mourning, Hugo has to remain an outsider: the other attendants of the ceremony "shrank away from him, horrified by the presence of a foreigner, a *firanghi*" (BB 206). Hugo is both mentally and physically overwhelmed by the impressions and the heat: "Hearing the babbling chant of the priests, seeing the confusion around the pyre, smelling the odours of burnt flesh and charred wood under the noontime sun, Baumgartner too wished he had not come, and shuffled away" (BB 206). Being an outsider, the Other, himself, he others the ceremonial procedures in return. Hugo

is ignorant of the fact that the differentiation both the group of mourners and he himself make is arbitrary.

This ignorance goes beyond the issues of cultural identity, empathy, and poverty as has already been acknowledged for example by Mufti, Hesse, and Craps (Mufti 255; Hesse 891; Craps 117).<sup>9</sup> What Hugo also does not realise is that he already finds himself in the fires as one of the dead himself. “[H]is mourning” (BB 166) is thus also the mourning of his own death. Blamires understands the corpseless and “silent funeral” in “East Coker” along similar lines: “The movement of civilization is wholly funereal, wholly deathward, yet there is ‘no one to bury’, for in the deepest sense we have died already” (60). Hugo’s suffering from the heat is, however, not Eliot’s Purgatory, which has an end point and something following it, but mirrors rather the burning ghats of Benares, where Kurt has spent some time, and the absurdity in the face of death as experienced in the cave. Hugo is not familiar with Benares, but Kurt’s descriptions leave no doubt about the desolate and mundane nature of the rituals, which he explicitly compares to the state of Hugo’s flat: in Benares, he would

spear the bits of flesh and bone that remained and fling them down the steps to the river bank where the dogs fell upon the pieces and ate, growling with hunger and greed and possession. He had plunged into the river and bathed there amongst the remains of the carcasses, [...]” (BB 156)

This is what Hugo, his food scraps, and the hungry cats remind him of. Living among the cats as well as their smell and dirt, Hugo is like Kurt bathing in the dirty river. The scene is repeated again in Kurt’s description of beggars who are fed by priests in Benares: “I have seen a leper with no legs, no hands, fighting a woman with his teeth – that was fun” (BB 148). Where Hugo responds with silence, “laughter” and “fun” have become Kurt’s natural reaction to these grotesque experiences.

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<sup>9</sup> Capshaw Smith develops an interesting counterargument against the view that Hugo is passive and deliberately ignorant of those around him. Focusing on his camp experience, Capshaw Smith shows how this detachment functions as a coping mechanism through an “absorption in the camp’s sensory detail” (143): Hugo can “trick his own consciousness into forgetting and suppressing the past by immersing himself in the physical details of his environment” (147).

## DEHUMANISATION

If Hugo is shocked by these stories, the reader has to realise that Hugo does not notice that he is living under an illusion: in a straight-forward sense this concerns the illusion of his superiority to others around him both financially and in attitude, but on a broader level it illustrates how Hugo has been divested of what qualifies him as a human being. The contrast da Silva arguably identified “between the portrait of Baumgartner’s gentleness and humility” and “the inhuman environment in which he lives that seals most convincingly the cruel and unsympathetic picture of India and its people” (68) is then only a felt contrast for Hugo. The reader, however, will see through it and not define India but life itself as “cruel and unsympathetic.” In her article on an understanding of Bombay through Walter Benjamin, Rajeev S. Patke demonstrates that “dehumanization [is] produced by urbanization” (20), thereby showing that these are wider concerns which are limited neither to Europe nor to South Asia. When Benjamin speaks of the knowledge of “those for whom poverty or vice turns the city into a landscape in which they stray from dark till sunrise” (Benjamin quoted in Patke 22), Patke places these wider concerns back into the context particular to Bombay with its variety of begging (27). The reader is, of course, reminded of Hugo as the poor stray or even as one of the straying cats. This parallel is also nicely shown by da Silva: Hugo’s cats move in menacing circles around his legs, just like he moves carefully around his neighbours, scared that they might pounce on him (71). After Hugo’s death, Chimanlal’s son compares Hugo to a beggar and upon seeing the corpse on the diwan asks: “What is *that* doing here? Call the police. Get *it* moved to the morgue” (BB 226, italics mine). The use of demonstrative and personal pronouns could not be more telling: Hugo has been rid of all individuality and has become a dehumanised object.

Hugo is not the only “human animal” (Bliss 532). When Hugo sees Kurt for the first time in the Café de Paris, he first thinks he is a cat, lying there “like a bag of pale fur” until he makes out “two solid baked brick-red arms of human flesh”: “It was only another human being” (BB 12). Hugo would have been more excited about a cat than a human; humans have become the lowest of all living creatures. Also Farrokh, the owner of the restaurant, identifies Kurt as an animal, who had fallen in front of his restaurant “like dead dog” (sic, BB 139). Kurt is also described in animal terms by the narrator. When Kurt says that he cannot pay his bills and

only wants to sit in the restaurant, “[h]is teeth showed between his lips, like an animal’s, in warning” (BB 142). Similarly, when he leaves Hugo’s bathroom, Kurt’s “eyes were concentrated and pinpointed with an animal ferocity” (BB 154). Kurt is personifying the past which haunts Hugo; he is the “jackal in the day, a hyena in the night” (BB 89).

The motif of dehumanisation, however, is not restricted to the animal perpetrator and human victim. Desai rather shows how most if not all characters have lost their dignity as humans. The human condition of suffering is then a suffering caused by the loss of human traits and values, as can be seen in an exchange between Hugo and Kurt about the latter’s admission of having eaten human flesh. Hugo’s syntax fails when he asks about it (“And – the bodies? Did you – also eat?” BB 157), revealing his shock. Kurt coolly replies that he has been with the tantrics from an ashram in Bihar: “With them, yes, I ate. I ate. [...] Is only flesh, only meat. For eating. For becoming strong. Strong” (BB 157). Eating human flesh like the dogs did and bathing in the river amongst carcasses and all sorts of other animals, Kurt’s intrusion exposes Hugo’s life as having more in common with the animals’ lives than the bourgeois lifestyle Hugo tries to maintain. The reader does not follow his attempts of survival as a dignified human being, but is rather witness to the slow dying of someone who lost what made him human in the burning fires of Bombay.

The topic of animality has also been picked up by Cheyette. He links the recurring theme of animals back to Hugo’s original trauma of the Holocaust, the loss of his family, and a wider sense of alienation, concluding “that he can only connect with the animal world” (*Diasporas* 247). This almost inverts cause and effect: according to Cheyette, alienation is a consequence of the Holocaust. For Desai, however, the Holocaust serves as an example for a more fundamental alienation. Cheyette also reads the ending of Desai’s novel in comparison with Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*: in both narratives, the dead body is treated like a dead animal that must be got rid of if the remaining characters are to secure a rosier future (Cheyette, *Diasporas* 255). Again, this kind of dehumanisation does not only apply to Hugo, but also to Lotte’s husband after his sudden death, for example. Lotte tells Hugo that Kanti’s “family was already fighting over the property – no one even to hold his hand, there in the hospital. Dogs die like that, in the street. This is how we go, Hugo [...]. In the end – alone” (BB 73). Cheyette goes further, interpreting

Hugo's intended representation of humanity as a failure, with the result that he is "frequently described in animal terms" (*Diasporas* 254). My reading aims at challenging this reading of *Baumgartner's Bombay*, as it can also be argued that this failure itself is an integral part of the human condition of suffering which Desai tried to convey. After all, Hugo defines being human as being vulnerable: "It was with his only son, the youngest child, that Chimanlal became entirely human in Baumgartner's eyes – by which he meant vulnerable" (BB 192). This vulnerability, so Desai's novel teaches the reader, is itself treacherous, too: after Chimanlal's death, his son decides not to continue employing Hugo, calling all oral agreements between his father and Hugo redundant. What makes Hugo human, his vulnerability, is also what makes him lose his humanity in the face of trauma. Tracing this sense of defeat in the novel in contrast to Eliot's "East Coker", this subsection started by revealing the cyclicity of time as degenerating, notions of hope and redemption as deceitful, and the purifying Purgatory as a cremation. The restoration, which Eliot believed possible, is denied in *Baumgartner's Bombay*. Eventually, Desai's characters lose everything, even their humanity.

### Conclusion

"East Coker" as a Second World War poem can be read as an intertext to *Baumgartner's Bombay*, showing how the recontextualisation of the Second World War in this Partition novel works not only on the level of content but also structurally. The first section continued from chapter one in looking at distance: the local has to be understood as interconnected with other places so that there is no simple dichotomy between here and there. This is exemplified not only in the conversations from before the war between Lotte and Hugo, but also in the presentation of the British camp in India. What Eliot describes as newness can be found in *Baumgartner's Bombay* in glimpses of the Holocaust from the periphery of Bombay. At the beginning of the Second World War, Eliot had to recognise that the world had not learnt from the mistakes of the past and in this sense refers to his own WWI poem *The Waste Land*. We can therefore find traces of the same feeling of powerlessness in both texts, as especially section two on 'the destroyed' has shown. Fire as weapon and harbinger of death is a common motif in both texts, as is the problem of articulation and silence as the only possible response in the face of trauma. Nevertheless, Eliot has hope for a purgatorial renewal. Desai, on the



other hand, does not see any hope for restoration. Eliot's faith is replaced with further destruction and the danger of losing one's humanity. The dehumanisation of the main character Hugo demonstrates Desai's view on the powerlessness of the individual in the face of history. While this might certainly be a problematic claim especially with regard to the role of the perpetrator, the novel is successful in revealing the global impact of events and in showing how these historical traumas can fruitfully enter into dialogue in their representations, which Mufti describes as the excavation of "a subterranean history – not simply of Europe, as in Arendt's well-known argument about the rise of Nazism – but of the modern world, a network of subterranean and uncanny linkages that connect 'Europe' to the world's peripheries" (249). Due to the process of "ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing", the novel's production rather than privatisation of the past qualifies as an example of multidirectional memory (*Multidirectional Memory* 3). This dialogue will be taken further in the following chapter, where it will be seen that postmemorial narratives about the Holocaust and the partition of India pursue a shared agenda in spite of their drastically different styles.

#### 4. Postmemory Texts: Different Styles, Shared Agenda

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The first chapter of this thesis showed how distance can be a useful tool for the analysis of postmemory and postcolonial texts. This joint reading of Second World War literature and postcolonial texts and contexts was extended in chapters two and three: the second chapter explored an example of how postcolonial discourse penetrates post-World War discourse, followed by the third chapter's recontextualisation of the Second World War in Partition literature. Having looked at a number of possible forms the relationship of trauma studies and postcolonialism can take, this fourth and final chapter examines how two modes of writing associated with post-war literature and postcolonialism, namely the documentary novel and magical realism, despite their manifest differences share the same aim of disclosing reality and truth as subjective, constructed, and multiple. This includes the imaginary recreation of past events but also the possibility of creating new realities altogether.

As an example of the documentary style, we can trace such an agenda for W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*. An excursus via *Die Ringe des Saturn* (1995) will serve as a foundation for the subsequent interpretation of selected passages from *Austerlitz*: Sebald's intertextual use of Jorge Luis Borges's short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" helps the reader to track Sebald's steps from a negation of time towards a (re)creation of reality. This is the case, for example, for the Terezn film, where the slowing down of the film results in a distorted – or merely different – version of reality. The analysis of Sebald through Borges makes it possible to go beyond the European context and to extend the postcolonial analysis of the second chapter.

Although Borges himself is generally not considered a magical realist writer, he can nevertheless serve as a bridge towards Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Borges looks at linear alongside cyclical modes of time in his short essay "Circular Time", tracing different approaches to eternal repetitions – themes and structures we have frequently encountered in the previous chapters and will encounter in Rushdie's novel again several times. After considering the Platonic and Nietzschean approaches, Borges looks at the "similar but not identical cycles" that can be encountered in Brahman culture, although he immediately also places them in a wider context through equivalent quotations from Marcus Aurelius

(“Circular Time” 226–27). Not only did Borges pick up on Indian concepts in his writing, but there was also literary exchange in the other direction, as Rushdie asserts: “The magical realism of the Latin Americans influences Indian-language writers in India today” (“Commonwealth Literature” 68). In the case of magical realism and *Midnight’s Children* it is again the analysis of temporality and chronology that helps to identify the novel’s aim of revealing the multitude of truths. For magical realism as a primarily dialectical genre is also concerned with the deconstruction of binary oppositions; at the same time, however, its dialectical nature ensures that it preserves these oppositions.

While one might think that the documentary does not side with the magical and that the magical realist mode rejects the document, if one takes a more distanced point of view – echoing ideas developed in the first chapter – it becomes possible to “think of the world—or rather the worlds—of fiction in counterpoint to the historical world, insofar as this relates to the resolution of the aporias of temporality” (Ricoeur, *Time III* 127). To this notional resolution one might also add – such is the argument of this thesis – the aporias of trauma. This chapter is therefore in its first section concerned with Sebald’s documentary style, extending Austerlitz’s conceptualisation of time explored in chapter two: following the intertextual traces of Borges in Sebald’s works – starting with *Die Ringe des Saturn* and ending with the Terezín film of *Austerlitz* – we are able to see not only a distortion of the document and time, but also a (re)creation of reality. The conceptualisation of reality through a negation of fixed notions of time and, more importantly, the possibility of recreating reality ultimately form the agenda which unites the documentary and magical realist approaches. The second section of this chapter will show how magical realism’s dialectical nature also reconceives the concept of truth: understanding truth as subjective construction, gossip and literal metaphor can be identified as two major tools in Rushdie’s stylistic repertoire to convey the ontological power of fiction in the aftermath of historical trauma.

#### 4.1 Sebald’s Refutation of Time

In Sebald’s novel *Die Ringe des Saturn* the narrator picks up on Borges’s “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” on several occasions. This example of intertextuality is also more broadly emblematic of how Sebald picks up on similar topics and motifs throughout his œuvre, which is also why this detour via *Die Ringe des Saturn* will

be interesting for our understanding of *Austerlitz*. The Borgesian intertext opens up new possibilities of understanding time in Sebald's works, which will ultimately lead to an equally differentiated understanding of reality. Reality's constructed nature as understood through Borges will form a bridge to Rushdie's magical realism in the second section.

BORGES'S "TLÖN" IN *DIE RINGE DES SATURN*:

SEBALD'S EARLY STEPS TOWARDS THE NEGATION OF TIME

Quite early in *Die Ringe des Saturn* the reader encounters Borges's *Book of Imaginary Beings* (RS 34). Surprisingly, however, this is not the text Sebald's narrator is reminded of when he thinks he has just seen a sea monster at a later point in the book. His thoughts are directed towards Borges's short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", which the narrator labels "argentinische Schrift" (RS 89). Over approximately two pages, Sebald gives a summary of this short story which deals with the questions of whether the place of Tlön really exists and whether fiction and the imagination can create reality – a similar question to the one the narrator asks himself about the sea monster. A substantial passage within this section of *Die Ringe des Saturn* – one of the two pages – is almost a translation of a small passage in Borges's text; the major differences are brief insertions to reflect the several narrative layers. The consequence is that Sebald's narrator summarises and narrates Borges's short story disproportionately:

Der Erzähler berichtet, wie er zusammen mit einem gewissen Bioy Cesares in einem Landhaus der Calle Gaona in Ramos Mejía an einem Abend des Jahres 1935 beim Nachtessen war und wie sie sich im Anschluß an dieses Nachtessen verloren hatten in einem weit ausschweifenden Gespräch über die Ausarbeitung eines Romans, der gegen offenkundige Tatsachen verstoßen und sich in verschiedene Widersprüche verwickeln sollte in einer Weise, die es wenigen Lesern – sehr wenigen Lesern – ermöglichen sollte, die in dem Erzählten verborgene, einesteils grauenvolle, andernteils gänzlich bedeutungslose Wirklichkeit zu erahnen. Am Ende des Flurganges, der zu dem Zimmer führte, in dem wir damals saßen, so der Verfasser weiter, hing ein ovaler, halbblinder Spiegel, von dem eine Art Beunruhigung ausging. Wir fühlten uns von diesem stummen Zeugen belauert, und also entdeckten wir – in tiefer Nacht sind dergleichen Entdeckungen fast unvermeidlich –, daß Spiegel etwas Entsetzliches haben. Bioy Cesares erinnerte demzufolge, einer der Häresiarchen von Uqbar habe erklärt, das Grauerregende an den Spiegeln und im übrigen auch an dem Akt der Paarung, bestünde darin, daß sie die Zahl der Menschen vervielfachen. Ich fragte Bioy Cesares, so der Verfasser, nach

der Herkunft dieser mir denkwürdig scheinenden Sentenz, und er sagte, die *Anglo-American Cyclopedia* führe sie an in ihrem Artikel über Uqbar. (RS 89–90)

Boy Cesares had had dinner with me that evening and we became lengthily engaged in a vast polemic concerning the composition of a novel in the first person, whose narrator would omit or disfigure the facts and indulge in various contradictions which would permit a few readers – very few readers – to perceive an atrocious or banal reality. From the remote depths of the corridor, the mirror spied upon us. We discovered (such a discovery is inevitable in the late hours of the night) that mirrors have something monstrous about them. Then Bioy Cesares recalled that one of the hersiarchs of Uqbar had declared that mirrors and copulation are abominable, because they increase the number of men. I asked him the origin of this memorable observation and he answered that it was reproduced in *The Anglo-American Cyclopedia*, in its article on Uqbar. (“Tlön” 27)

Sebald’s version is even slightly longer than the English translation of Borges’s text. On the one hand this is due to German as an analytic language compared to English’s syntheticity, on the other hand Sebald slightly alters Borges’s style through subtle insertions to adjust it to his own prose style. Alongside the insertion of indicators of reported speech, a second kind of inserted elements adds ambiguity: in Sebald’s summary, the reality that can be discovered is hidden (“verborgen”). This is a rather drastic change to the original as it means that this reality also exists outside the reading process, while Borges stresses the creation of reality through the active reading process. Borges’s narrator speaks of a novel where facts are omitted or disfigured; Sebald’s narrator turns these facts into “offenkundige” facts – a word which pretends to mean ‘what everyone knows’ but cannot pin down what exactly that is. A similar case is the mirror’s uncanny aura, “eine Art Beunruhigung.” Again it is suggested that it is a kind of perturbation, but the reader is not given any specific information on the precise nature of this experience. This Kafkaesque element of Sebald’s style continues with the “halbblinder Spiegel” that is a “stumme[r] Zeuge[ ]” at the same time. Borges’s spying mirror might have been more aptly translated as *Spitzel* or *Spion*, which Sebald tries to include through the use of the verb *belauern*. Sebald disfigures the original text by Borges to such a degree that even the attentive reader cannot be sure if the mirror, being blind and mute, is disabled and cannot therefore aptly perform its role as a witness or whether it might not be a disguise to be the perfect spy (*belauern*).

Similarly, the last thirteen lines of the passage in Sebald's work paraphrase, rather than summarise, the last two sections of Borges's story. What Sebald omits is precisely the passage in which reality is created through the fictional; where Tlön comes into existence through Borges's narration. One might therefore want to argue that Sebald's narrator has already accepted the existence of Tlön and consequently also the interchangeability of the unreal and reality. Sebald's use of Borges's short story in this instance repeats and performs what the narrator discovered in "Tlön": it is proof of how one can get "über das rein Irreale im Laufe der Zeit zu einer neuen Wirklichkeit" (RS 91). This will make us question not only the concept of reality but also that of truth, as will be discussed in a later section of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

What has been left out by Sebald is picked up again about a hundred pages later: the philosophy of Tlön – more precisely a philosophy of time. The preceding anecdote about rulers of the Chinese empire ends with the death of the Empress Dowager Cixi, who had ruled for almost 50 years in lieu of her son and, so Sebald writes, ruined the country. As in *Austerlitz* the reader is confronted with a pessimistic worldview that identifies all progress as oriented backwards and history as repeating itself: "Sie [Cixi] sehe jetzt, sagte sich, in dem sie zurückblicke, wie die Geschichte aus nichts bestehe als aus dem Unglück und den Anfechtungen, die über uns hereinbrechen" (RS 185). Borges's writing is shaped by a similar dialectical style, with which he shows how the "overturning of convention create[s] a new, higher set of conventions" (Sieber 207). The transition to the philosophical theories of Tlön might seem a bit abrupt, but already during the preceding anecdote, distorted time has been addressed. The narrator reports about a period of drought that leads to a "Verlangsamung aller Bewegung" (RS 181), which reminds us of the Terezín film in slow motion in *Austerlitz*: "Über dem bloßen Anheben einer Hand, dem Senken eines Augenlids, dem Verströmen des letzten Atems verging, so schien es bisweilen, ein halbes Jahrhundert. Und mit der Auflösung der Zeit lösten sich auch alle anderen Verhältnisse auf" (RS 182). Both the drought and its consequences are linked to destruction and death: families swap their children because the parents cannot bear to see their own children dying. However, even death has lost the possibility of being a relief as the moment of dying has become a lengthy period itself. All other "Verhältnisse" are dissolved, suggesting a situation of decay and collapse that denies the possibility of restoration. Cixi is less

concerned about the people than she is about the caterpillars: “Sie erschienen ihr als das ideale Volk, dienstfertig, todesbereit, in kurzer Zeit beliebig vermehrbar, ausgerichtet nur auf den einzigen ihnen vorbestimmten Zweck, völlig das Gegenteil der Menschen, auf die grundsätzlich kein Verlass war” (RS 183). With the caterpillar we have an earlier version of the metaphor of the moth. As a caterpillar the insect is less mobile and can therefore not yet stand for the interaction of past and present through its flickering presence in the night air. Here the caterpillar represents the opposite of the moth: it is closer to the straight lines of Nazi marches as observed by Austerlitz’s father and the unadaptive character of a linear notion of history and time. Emerging from its cocoon, it can escape the “vorbestimmten Zweck” and metaphorically represent alternative ways of engaging with the past. Reading *Die Ringe des Saturn* after *Austerlitz*, contrary to their publication years, the caterpillar is also another link to the topic of time that follows the passage on the Empress Dowager Cixi.

Sebald’s narrator highlights the negation of time syntactically by putting it at the beginning of the paragraph and sentence on the philosophies of Tlön: “Die Leugnung der Zeit, heißt es in der Schrift über den Orbis Tertius, sei der wichtigste Grundsatz der philosophischen Schulen von Tlön“ (RS 185). We have here the, for Sebald, typical insertion of reported speech markers, referring to a text read by the characters in Borges’s short story. However, the claim that the negation was the most important principle of all philosophical thoughts cannot be found in Borges’s original. In Borges’s short story, the negation of time is merely one of many different schools of thought; Sebald’s change turns the negation of time into the unifying principle of all schools. It further highlights the importance of the negation of the whole concept to Sebald’s thinking and writing, as has already been established in the second chapter on *Austerlitz*. A further change to this school’s thoughts are made about the claims regarding the future. In Borges’s story “the future has no reality other than as a present hope” (34), which is changed to “Furcht und Hoffnung” (RS 186) by Sebald, adding a negative element to adapt this concept of future to his own pessimistic worldview. The two following schools in Sebald’s text strongly deviate from the original: they are not modelled on a passage in Borges’s short story. The first addition represents Sebald’s pessimism in history, which denies man the ability of development and progress: “Nach einer anderen Ansicht ist die Welt und alles, was jetzt auf ihr lebt, vor einigen Minuten erst

geschaffen worden zugleich mit ihrer ebenso kompletten wie illusorischen Vorgeschichte“ (RS 186). The “destruction of binary oppositions” and the “rejection of the notion of historic progress as well as utopian projects” have been identified as uniting the writerly ambitions of Sebald and Borges (Eckart 520). Jan-Henrik Witthaus describes both Sebald and Borges as “Skeptiker” who no longer trust in the stability of existing traditions and Jennifer Donnelly adds that “Borges’ nonlinear temporalities are a reaction against the unilateral linearity of historically progressive modernist time” (83). The second addition emphasises Sebald’s negativity, describing the world as “Sackgäßchen” or “Dunsthof.” The “Sackgäßchen in der großen Stadt Gottes” shows how the metaphysical exceeds man and demonstrates that his ability of knowing and understanding is limited (“unbegreifliche[ ] Bilder”). It is doubtful if Sebald (and Borges) wanted to offer a momentary release or distraction “from the repressive alienating intellectual pressures of modernity” (Jochen Schulte Sasse quoted in Eckart 519). Reading Sebald and Borges against the backdrop of modernist thoughts and through Walter Benjamin also against the backdrop of the Frankfurt school, the texts further manifest what Peter Childs summarises as the “emerging view of history, as detritus and shored ruins” and, thus, the negative and regressive side of modernist developments:

Modernity is both the culmination of the past and the harbinger of the future, pinpointing a moment of potential breakdown in socio-cultural relations and aesthetic representation. It is not surprising that artistic reactions and responses bifurcated into the largely celebratory (Marinetti, Le Corbusier, Mayakovsky) and, particularly in the British Isles, the primarily condemnatory or apocalyptic and despairing (T.S.Eliot, W.B.Yeats, Ezra Pound, T.E.Hulme, D.H.Lawrence). (Childs 15–16)

As the historical negativism shows, the works discussed here do not represent the notion of literature as distraction, but rather a modernist’s sense of being stuck in the collapse. Eventually, Sebald goes back to his source: his fourth school of thought correlates to Borges’s second school and the diction has again almost the quality of a translation. In Borges’s original it is said that “*all time* has already transpired and that our life is only the crepuscular and no doubt falsified and mutilated memory or reflection of an irrevocable process” (“Tlön” 34–35). Interestingly Sebald omits the words “no doubt falsified and mutilated”, which



seems surprising as Sebald's works too highlight the changing nature of memory and history.

Sebald bypasses three further schools that can be found in Borges's text: one about history and all human lives being a scripture written by a god in order to communicate with a demon, and a second one about cryptography, claiming "that only what happens every three hundred nights is true" ("Tlön" 35). These two schools are linked to the mythological and do not seem to fall into Sebald's area of interest. The third school that is left out by Sebald concerns multiple existence: "while we sleep here, we are awake elsewhere and [...] in this way every man is two men" (35). This claim seems to go beyond Sebald's approach, which is based on observation and reflection. By omitting these three schools of thought, Sebald's ending of this passage on the philosophies of Tlön stresses elements linked to the crepuscular reflection ("nachdämmernde[r] Widerschein", RS 186), which reminds the reader of the flickering of the moth. Summing up Sebald's changes to Borges's short story, we can say that he emphasises the redundancy of the categories of time: the future is the fears and hopes of the present and the past is memory, and therefore also based in the present. If future and past are subjective and emotional experiences of the present, the categorisation has become futile. Such thoughts can be placed in a larger context of ideas on the conceptualisation of time, stretching back to Sextus Empiricus, whose observation "that the past and the future, since they are already passed and yet to come, do not exist", is quoted by Borges in another text (Jenckes 123), but also to Saint Augustine's *Confessions* in the late fourth century. Augustine famously describes the possibility and difficulty of measuring time through space as well as through sound and reaches the conclusion that "I am not measuring the future which does not yet exist, nor the present which has no extension, nor the past which is no longer in being" (240).

Futility is further stressed with the added school of human history as an illusion and the world as being stuck in a cul-de-sac: man can move neither backwards nor forwards. The narrator in *Die Ringe des Saturn* concludes, leaning on Borges again, that everything we believe connects us to the past is just an afterglow. Sebald's selection and adaptation further strengthens the points made in chapter two. In contrast to Borges, Sebald's schools of thought all support the idea that the categories of time have become redundant. Any alternative systems or understandings of time, which can be found in Borges's short story, have

consistently been omitted by Sebald. After working on theories and concepts of the negation of time through Borges in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, Austerlitz, in a next step, tries to phrase his own theory of the non-existence of time. Reversing the order of reading, starting with his last text *Austerlitz*, makes early stages of similar trains of thoughts in his œuvre explicit.

Borges's elaborations on time go beyond "Tlön." When his narrator in the short story says that "[o]ne of the schools of Tlön goes so far as to negate time: it reasons that the present is indefinite, that the future has no reality other than as a present hope, that the past has no reality other than as a present memory" (34), these ideas can be complemented with Borges's thoughts in his essay "A New Refutation of Time", where he explains that "[t]his does not mean that we shall never know, even in an approximate fashion, the date of that dream; it means that the chronological fixing of an event, of an event in the universe, is alien and external to it" (267). Time, Borges suggests, is nothing natural but something created and imposed by man. Time has always been thought to bring progress but for *natural* progression this artificial categorisation is not needed. Reusing the image of the flickering of the moth with its swirls and loops, we recognise how time and memory try to resist chronology.

Similar to Austerlitz, however, Borges has difficulty with an alternative theory surrounding the topic of time: "As yet I am ignorant of the ethics of the system I have outlined. I do not know if it even exists" ("A New Refutation" 259). Borges leaves space for the possibility of failure just like Austerlitz through his self-reflexive style, which stresses that his knowledge and understanding is limited and therefore prone to flaws. Borges and Austerlitz are aware how difficult a task it is to establish a theory of a concept that has just been negated. In "Tlön", Borges's narrator describes this dilemma as follows: "the mere act of naming it – i.e., of classifying it – implies a falsification" (34). In his essay on time, Borges explains in more detail how language is incapable of being used to describe this negation of time as language is temporal itself: "All language is of successive nature; it does not lend itself to a reasoning of the eternal, the intemporal" ("A New Refutation" 260). This mirrors the modernist's and certainly Austerlitz's feeling of the inadequacy of language with the consequence that, as Gabriele Eckart rightly points out about Sebald, "since he has no other choice but to use language to write his books, he cannot but distrust his own discourse" (512). Language is not only

insufficient to describe the traumatic event or fully capture its memory because the event is indescribable, but language also tries to put the event into a linear and chronological order that is unnatural to the processes of remembering.

Yet following Borges and Sebald, what can disrupt a linear concept of time? In the case of *Austerlitz* these disruptions were the many coincidences. They followed a certain pattern regarding their function as temporal manifestations of an opportunity for access to a past just like the flickerings of the moth are visual and spatial manifestations. To Borges, as Bertrand P. Helm shows, “the successiveness of the temporal series has been irreparably broken by the repetitions” (79). In the case of *Austerlitz* repetitions appear more as logical consequences rather than as disruptions: the narrator’s second visit to Breendonk does not repeat his first visit but results from his encounters with Austerlitz. And yet coincidence and repetition are linked in Sebald’s works. Again, a passage from *Die Ringe des Saturn* can help to clarify *Austerlitz*:

Sooft ich mir sage, daß dergleichen Zufälle sich weitaus häufiger ereignen, als wir ahnen, weil wir uns alle, einer hinter dem anderen, entlang derselben, von unserem Herkommen und unseren Hoffnungen vorgezeichneten Straßen bewegen, sowenig vermag ich mit meiner Vernunft gegen die mich immer öfter durchgeisternden Phantome der Wiederholung. (RS 223)

This passage is reminiscent of the school of thought of Tlön that describes the future as defined by our hopes. The future is therefore predetermined and coincidences are events that were meant to happen but of which we were merely unaware. Repetitions not only illustrate that the linearity of time is broken up by revealing the true and predetermined nature of the coincidence, they also show that progress is an illusion. Sebald’s narrator in *Die Ringe des Saturn* suffers physically from the consequences and the awareness of these repetitions and describes them as a “Lähmung des Denkvermögens” and as “Ins-Leere-Treten” (RS 224). He links thought and temporality and uses a spatial image to explain metaphorically the negation of time. It should be noticed, however, that the narrator speaks of phantoms of repetition (“Phantome”). If we consider the multitude of coincidences in Sebald’s book as a kind of repetition, the phantom, the imagined object, equals the visible light of the moth that is itself already long gone when it is perceived. Sebald’s works – and *Austerlitz in particular* – suggest consequently that the phantoms of repetition are access points for memory. Repeated coincidences in

*Austerlitz* are dynamic; they thus overcome traditional concepts of time. Eventually they enable the narrator to start his own journey and quest into the past. While both Sebald and Borges share a certain historical pessimism that sees history repeating itself, Sebald's use of repetition goes beyond Borges's understanding of it as temporal disruption, as Sebald adds a functional element. This functional element will be considered in more detail in the following subsection, which traces the distortion of time – and through that the distortion of reality – in *Austerlitz*. Starting with Austerlitz's attempt to read H.G. Adler's book on Terezín and culminating in the analysis of the slowed down version of the Terezín film, the following elaborations will show how this distortion does not necessarily obscure reality, but rather helps to come to a differentiated, subjective, and pluralistic understanding of reality.

#### DISTORTED TIMES AND DISTORTED REALITIES IN *AUSTERLITZ*:

##### TEREZÍN AS A CASE STUDY

Austerlitz experiences a high degree of inadequacy towards the subject of his narration, in this particular instance the ghetto of Terezín. He therefore consults different sources with the hope of finding reliable accounts in order to get a complete understanding of the situation and living conditions in Terezín. A first attempt to gain this understanding is Austerlitz's reading of H.G. Adler's book about the ghetto, which he reads during his breaks from gardening, an activity which he takes up for two years after a mental breakdown. The mental breakdown was a consequence of the discovery of his true identity; interestingly he did not suffer because of the loss of his true, biological parents but because he feels estranged to the childhood he had in Wales even though he had not liked it. In the time leading up to the breakdown, Austerlitz describes himself as “das von seinem vertrauten Leben von einem Tag auf den anderen abgesonderte Kind” (A 326). The traumatic component is not the Holocaust and *Kindertransport* but the fact that his true identity has been revealed to him: “die Vernunft kam nicht an gegen das seit jeher von mir unterdrückte und jetzt gewaltsam aus mir hervorbrechende Gefühl des Verstoßen- und Ausgelöschtseins” (A 326–27). A period of physical and mental suffering ends for Austerlitz in a psychiatric hospital. When he can leave the hospital again, he takes up gardening as a kind of rehab programme and makes it part of his daily routine for two years. His preoccupation with family history continues incessantly. With Adler's book, Austerlitz does not try to restore family

bonds but rather to establish new ones to his biological parents and more specifically his mother.

Austerlitz explains here that the lack of knowledge was responsible for his not having been able to picture more precise details:

Die Lektüre, die mir Zeile für Zeile Einblicke eröffnete in das, was ich mir bei meinem Besuch in der Festungsstadt aus meiner so gut wie vollkommenen Unwissenheit heraus nicht hatte vorstellen können, ging aufgrund meiner mangelhaften Deutschkenntnisse unendlich langsam vonstatten, [...]. (A 334)

When he visited the fortified town, he described the houses as mute and the windows as blind, almost repeating Hilary's words about Iver Grove (A 271). Knowledge and imagination are linked dialogically. *Vorstellen* refers on the one hand to real facts but on the other hand also to a non-realistic mode of imagination, to something that bypasses the actual impossibility of knowing. This echoes Austerlitz's visit to Terezín, where it is only after he has left the museum, which is like the museum at the Royal Observatory a place of the dissociated past, that Austerlitz can fill the place with life in his imagination:

als wären sie nicht fortgebracht worden, sondern lebten nach wie vor, dichtgedrängt in den Häusern, in den Souterrains und auf den Dachböden, als gingen sie pausenlos die Stiegen auf und ab, schauten bei den Fenstern heraus, bewegten sich in großer Zahl durch die Straßen und Gassen und erfüllten sogar in stummer Versammlung den gesamten, grau von dem feinen Regen schraffierten Raum der Luft. (A 285)

Furthermore, Adler's book is written in German and Austerlitz claims that his language skills were not good enough to read the book fluently. He compares the process of reading this book in German with the "Entziffern einer ägyptischen oder babylonischen Keil- oder Zeichenschrift" (A 334). With the comparison to the old Egyptian language, Austerlitz picks a sign system in which signifier and signified were not arbitrary. This was initially also the case for the Babylonian cuneiform script (Walker 10). Thus, Sebald's comment fulfils two functions: it is another example of the inadequacy of (modern) language and the expression of the wish for visualisation. Yet, Austerlitz's reliability has to be called into question again with regard to his claim about his language skills, as only a couple of lines later the narrator remarks: "Austerlitz artikulierte diese deutschen Schachtelwörter zu meiner Verwunderung ohne jedes Zögern und ohne die geringste Spur eines

Akzents" (A 334). His reappropriation of the German language seems as wondrous as the sudden remembering of his Czech mother tongue. Eventually, Austerlitz has to acknowledge that his language and reading problems are just part of a larger problem of understanding. The inadequacy of language is a common problem and motif in post-Second World War literature related to the topics of trauma and survivors, who cannot make themselves understood. Robert Eaglestone explains this difficulty by suggesting that the groups of survivors and outsiders use different language systems since signifier and signified have shifted. Pain, for example, might exist in both languages and can be described; however, it can never be re-experienced by an outsider (Eaglestone, *The Holocaust* 17–18). Sebald's characters are repeatedly inflicted by a form of language crisis, which is reminiscent of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's Chandos letter (Hutchinson, *Die dialektische Imagination* 109). Also the narrator in *Schwindel. Gefühle* judges his writing as "das sinnloseste, leerste und verlogenste Gekritzel" (109) and in his own writing project, Austerlitz bemoans: "Keine Wendung im Satz, die sich dann nicht als eine jämmerliche Krücke erwies, kein Wort, das nicht ausgehöhlt klang und verlogen" (A 177).

Reading Adler's account, Austerlitz has difficulties putting the individual words and phrases into a larger, meaningful context, "weil das Ghettosystem in seiner gewissermaßen futuristischen Verformung des gesellschaftlichen Lebens für mich den Charakter des Irrealen behielt, trotzdem es Adler ja beschreibt bis in das letzte Detail und in seiner ganzen Tatsächlichkeit" (A 335). The "letzte Detail" and "ganze Tatsächlichkeit" reveal again Austerlitz's wish for complete understanding and, thus, what he *hoped* to find in Adler's book rather than what Adler's book actually offers. But it also shows how the documentary approach in the form of an historical account based on facts reaches its limits. Even if it were able to describe every detail of the entire ghetto, it would still not suffice to stimulate and enable the *imagination* to picture it. A second reason for this unsuccessful venture into the past of Terezín through Adler's book is precisely the lengthy reading process. Austerlitz could not find meaning in the book, "weil ich nicht selten für eine Seite bis nach Mitternacht brauchte und in solcher Zerdehntheit sich vieles verlor" (A 335). Reading time exceeds both story and discourse time of Adler's work. This stretching out of time ("Zerdehntheit") is accountable for lost meanings. The text lacks coherence due to the stretched reading process. Austerlitz's reading of Adler's book can therefore serve as a first example of where time is distorted for the purpose

of better understanding a past reality, even though the project remains unsuccessful; Terezín seems to Austerlitz *more* distanced after reading Adler's book, not less.

The ghetto of Terezín has become, in other words, "diese[r] extraterritoriale[ ] Ort" (A 335). Through Adler, Austerlitz can neither understand nor imagine what the ghetto must have been like. It stays surreal – beyond reality ("Charakter des Irrealen", A 335), beyond time ("futuristische[ ] Verformung", A 335) and beyond space. Extra-territoriality in the first instance refers to a space free from local jurisdiction, which might be an apt description of the situation during the NS period, but in this context it can literally be seen as being beyond space. This second understanding can be gained from an etymological analysis of 'extra-territorial' when it is broken up into its originally Latin components 'extra' and 'terra.' 'Terra' can refer to land in the sense of those parts of the earth that are dry, but also to the earth as a whole. 'Extra' can be translated as outside, except or beyond. Thus, 'extra-territorial' refers to something beyond the world or reality we live in. It is not identified what or where this extra-territorial place is; Sebald indeed uses it in some of his other works as well, for example in reference to an abandoned military base in the UK. As Sebald offers a term that only describes what it is not – not part of this place or reality –, it must be understood as a term that wants to express that it is also beyond our ability to conceptualise it. The link to our reality is nevertheless existent; extra-territorial does not mean alien. In the case of *Austerlitz* and the ghetto of Terezín the link of the extra-territorial place to *terra* is the fact that the ghetto has been built up and sustained by men and that it was occupied by people who appear in Austerlitz's narration in a list of professions and places of origin (A 335–37). Though not an alien place, it has become extraterritorial for those who came after: the personal link is missing and Austerlitz's lengthy reading process with the aim of understanding the past has the effect of estranging him from it even more.

Austerlitz then puts all his hopes into a Terezín propaganda film, which Adler himself could not get hold of. Austerlitz identifies a gap in Adler's account and seems to believe that if he could feel the gap in Adler's book on Terezín, he must be able to get the whole picture: "Immerzu dachte ich, wenn nur der Film wieder auftauchte, so würde ich vielleicht sehen oder erahnen können, wie es in Wirklichkeit war" (A 346). Austerlitz is longing to know a reality that he here defines as "mich in das Ghetto zurückversetzen" (A 346), which, so he says, is impossible through Adler's book. This goes beyond the mere understanding and

knowing of (historical) fact as he wants to see the ghetto through the detainees' eyes. Even before he has a copy of the film, Austerlitz indulges in fantasies and images of the film he invents in his mind; phrases such as "malte ich mir aus" and "bildete ich mir ein" (A 346) clearly illustrate the subjective nature of his fantasies. Austerlitz imagines his mother to be an actor in the role of Olympia in *Hoffmanns Erzählungen* – a story about the distortion of truth: Olympia, an automaton, seemingly comes to life because the protagonist is given a special pair of glasses or rather because he creates this reality in his mind. This reflects what happens to and through Austerlitz when he analyses the Terezín film and eventually even thinks he is able to feel physically ("zu spüren meinte") how his mother steps out of the film to become one with him (A 346). "Solche Phantasien" (A 346), however, are doomed to be disappointed: "Aber nichts von all diesen Bildern ging mir zunächst in den Kopf, sondern flimmerten mir bloß vor den Augen in einer Art von kontinuierlicher Irritation" (A 348). Is this the film's fault, "[die] Trägheit unseres Auges" (A 135), or rather a symptom of an eye disease as experienced by the narrator (A 55–56)? All of these might in fact represent the inability to perceive this past with the senses and methods we conventionally use. The list of things Austerlitz sees in the film shows how he again cannot meaningfully integrate the information he is given (A 347–48). Austerlitz's first strategy is to watch the 14-minute-long film repeatedly, but again without success, because he could "nirgends die Agáta sehen [...], so oft ich den Streifen auch anschaute" (A 348). The subsequent temporal collapse brings back the picture of the moth to the reader's mind. Austerlitz has the idea of watching the film in slow motion with the aim of "genauer in die gewissermaßen im Aufscheinen schon vergehenden Bilder hineinblicken zu können" (A 348). The flickering of the moth is repeated in the lighting up of the image of the film. As soon as the image is perceived, it has already been replaced by the following pictures so that what is seen is only the trace of something that has already disappeared. Both are linked to sight and belatedness, to delayed and slowed down vision.

At first, the copy of the film in slow motion seems to bring about the hoped for change: "und tatsächlich sind in diesem um ein Vierfaches verlängerten Dokument, das ich seither immer wieder von neuem mir angesehen habe, Dinge und Personen sichtbar geworden, die mir bis dahin verborgen geblieben waren" (A 349). The changes, however, all contribute to a perception of dehumanisation. Movements are



shown so slowly that it seems to Austerlitz as if the workers depicted were asleep: “so schwer senkten sich ihre Lider, so langsam bewegten sich ihre Lippen und blickten sie zu der Kamera auf. Ihr Gehen glich nun einem Schweben, als berührten die Füße den Boden nicht mehr” (A 349). Not only is Austerlitz’s viewing of the film slowed down but also the workers’ gaze. These slow and heavy movements remind the reader of the sick and old and culminate in the levitating moribund, who have found another grave in the sky, echoing Paul Celan’s “Todesfuge.” The shapes of the body blur until they literally disappear: “die Körperformen waren unscharf geworden und hatten sich [...] an ihren Rändern aufgelöst” (A 349). Physical decay also affects the material of the film and is only noticed by Austerlitz in the slow version of the film, with the consequence that images are annihilated (“löschten es aus”, A 349) and replaced by white patches with many black dots, again reminding us of the narrator’s eye problems earlier in the book (A 51). This also highlights the nature of the source material as a historical document. It is subject to decay itself and does not remain a timeless eyewitness. Its status as an objective and reliable source must be questioned, which we are beginning to see through the analysis of the different film Austerlitz gets to see, when he slows the film’s speed down. The joyful dance music is turned into “ein mit geradezu grotesker Trägheit sich dahinschleppender Trauermarsch” (A 352). These pieces of music, according to Austerlitz, “bewegen sich in einer sozusagen subterranean Welt, in schreckensvollen Tiefen [...], in die keine menschliche Stimme jemals hinabgestiegen ist” (A 352). While earlier Terezín was beyond reality, it is now below the world that we know, establishing a link to the underworld and realms of the dead, which are also beyond the human voice’s reach and beyond our reality. Terezín thus becomes the extraterritorial cemetery or underworld. Language has become unidentifiable and is now a “bedrohliches Grollen” (A 353). Whilst the signifier has been rid of its actual purpose, language as a whole still fulfils its function of conveying meaning. Similarly the well-known long sentence, stretching over ten pages, in a sense ignores syntax and its purpose of structuring language into manageable units, but it nevertheless does so by adhering to grammatical rules. Creating a linguistic vertigo, the reader is transfixed and absorbed by the words’ content, potentially not even realising the syntactic phenomenon. In this extraterritorial cemetery, the only meaning that needed to be conveyed was that of fear and threat, that of the looming extinction of life. The menacing growl reminds Austerlitz of a visit to the *Jardin*

*des Plantes* in Paris where he heard the roaring of lions and tigers – another case of imprisonment and distorted time as they kept roaring “Stunde um Stunde, ohne Unterlaß” (A 353). The comparison with the lions and tigers, however, does not necessarily make their suffering more human, but rather further dehumanises Tereziín. No longer is sound in the slow version of the film intelligible as human. While the film was ostensibly shot in order to show how sorrow-free and humane life in the ghetto was, a second narrative can be found in the film itself. Slowing it down enables Austerlitz – and *a fortiori* the attentive reader of Austerlitz’s account – to identify a second truth. Referring to Primo Levi’s accounts, Astrid Oeasman points out that “[r]adical slowness was one of the effects that systematic deprivation, endless surveillance, and physical and psychological torture had on inmates” (465). In this sense, only the manipulation of the film material reveals the reality of the camp. This truth is not ‘more true’ or in a hierarchical relationship to the one if the film is watched at its actual speed; it is simply a different one. Therefore, it does not hold the ultimate and complete truth either, but is flawed itself. What Theodor W. Adorno claims about truth content is consequently equally applicable to memory: it “presents itself in art as multiplicity, not as the concept that abstractly subordinates artwork (*Aesthetic Theory* 173).

The biggest flaw that the distorted viewing creates is the case of the woman whom Austerlitz mistakenly identifies as his mother Agáta, although he does not actually know what she looks like. His picture of her is based on “schwachen Erinnerungen” and “wenigen übrigen Anhaltspunkten” (A 354); he does not know but only fantasises and thinks he knows. He repeatedly watches a section of four seconds. The display indicating the time of the film partly hides her face and it is in this moment that Austerlitz has the impression that time moves too fast even in this slowed down version of the film: “und die Hundertselsekunden, die sich davondrehen, so geschwind, daß man sie nicht entziffern und festhalten kann” (A 355); slowing the film down has the consequence of it being too fast. Now it is not only the film and its individual images that Austerlitz cannot grasp, it is time itself. Věra later confirms that the woman in the film is not Agáta (A 356), something that Austerlitz could not have found out through the film and its technical manipulation. It is in fact through the distortion of time of this historical document that Austerlitz was able to imagine and thus create a different, and in this case wrong, truth.

Contemporary memory texts, in other words, show how a message equally depends on sender and recipient. In this process of sending and perceiving, the message can alter: Sebald's protagonist goes on a quest to find out about his mother's fate – and yet the reader sees a slightly different text if he or she notices and follows the references and traces that Sebald scatters throughout his book. Truth is therefore not defined hierarchically or classified as objective, but rather as traces in an oblique variety that need to be discovered. This might also broaden the scope of the concept of memory, which is no longer to be defined by the simple dichotomy between personal memory and historical fact.

#### CREATIONS OF REALITY

Austerlitz's search into the past in the case of Terezín might not have resulted in finding a truth that is historically correct, but it is not to be interpreted as failure. The reader could witness how a second truth and alternative reality were created through the distortion of time. The imagination plays a key role and is explored in the following section on magical realism. Borges forms the transition as an intertextual reference between Sebald's documentary fiction and Rushdie's magical realism: both put epistemologies and ontologies to the test.

In "Tlön" Borges writes that "[t]he metaphysicians of Tlön do not seek for the truth or even for verisimilitude, but rather for the astounding" (34). The aim of art is therefore not mimesis but to stir up a debate about mankind being stuck in outdated traditions and conventions. Rather than arguing cause and consequence as a temporal sequence, Borges shows how in this philosophical school, space and time are not lined. The sequence would be considered an association: "In other words, they do not conceive that the spatial persists in time. The perception of a cloud of smoke on the horizon and then of the burning field and then of the half-extinguished cigarette that produced the blaze is considered an example of association of ideas" ("Tlön" 34). To Borges, the world and its reality consist of these ideas and meaning is created through their association. This means that the concept of time also only exists because it is thought of (Eckart 514); the only temporal state that actually exists is the present. Again his essay "A New Refutation of Time" further clarifies these points from the short story: "Outside each perception (real or conjectural) matter does not exist; outside each mental state spirit does not exist; neither does time exist outside each present moment" (266). There

is no other reality than that of mental processes, according to Borges's idealism. Sharon L. Sieber sums this dialectical approach up as follows: "Just as Borges uses tradition to deconstruct tradition and order to subvert order, so he also uses logic and symmetry to undermine the basis of logic and symmetry" (204). This, of course, goes hand in hand with the problem of language, that is on the one hand deficient and on the other hand the only medium to express this idea of deficiency. These epistemological questions make the readers suspicious and, as Sieber describes, "turn[ ] the readers against themselves through exposing their inconsistencies in the perception of reality" (207). Borges's "writing that is also a kind of listening" (Jenckes 134) mirrors Sebald's active narrator. In contrast to Sebald, however, Borges does not end on a melancholic and pessimistic note. While he acknowledges the difficulty of expression, Kate Jenckes shows how Borges looks beyond: "Language does not indicate a ground of being, but rather contains a promise: it tells not what *is*, but what may be beyond its comprehension" (Jenckes 127). This is further supported by Borges's understanding and use of metaphor, which Jenckes etymologically relates to translation: both try to carry a meaning across – a "moving across that is never total, that always leaves a remainder, a slight difference", which Borges prefers to the concept of metaphor as a "figure that would transfer anything entirely, that would be able to contain the universe in its forms" (Jenckes 134). This understanding of metaphor and language as dynamic and valuing rather than condemning this incompleteness opens up new possibilities to Borges precisely with regard to the future: the backward-turned prophets "through their contemplation of history's repeated metaphors can reveal a difference that opens to a future not contained by those metaphors" (Jenckes 138).

Borges's elaborations also concern identity and ontological questions. He states that "behind our faces there is no secret self which governs our acts and receives our impressions; we are, solely, the series of these imaginary acts and these errant impressions" ("A New Refutation" 256). Man could be the powerful agent if only s/he were aware of the fact that the self, or on a larger scale a creator figure, does not exist, but is only believed to exist. All these projections do not point at or disguise our identity, they are our identity. This, however, also implies drastic consequences for what is not known or not thought of, as Eckart rightly points out: "In the universe of Borges' story, things cease to exist as soon as they are forgotten" (517). This comment describes the major concern of many contemporary memory

texts: the danger of events and stories being forgotten. Considering how many stories are already lost because they were never spoken about, this danger actually represents the current situation. Whilst the Holocaust novel appears to be an established genre, most Holocaust survivors did not write their memoirs or any fictional or non-fictional account, not to mention the impossibility of retrieving the stories of those who died during the war. Borges's short story and essay show how in a reality where words as the visualisation of thoughts are all-powerful and creating, their rejection might be equally destructive as certain experiences would be silenced and therefore unrelated to the reality of ideas. Linking these ideas to the imagination and fiction, the ensuing question is whether realities and truths can consciously and actively be created through imagining them. While I do not wish to equate Sebald's, Borges's and Rushdie's genres, I nevertheless think that Rushdie's magical realism can contribute to this debate in the context of trauma and postmemory.

#### **4.2 Salman Rushdie's Magical Realism: the Truths of Gossip in *Midnight's Children***

With the partition of India, Rushdie chose the topic of another mass atrocity and the issue of how it is remembered. The magical realist mode of writing accommodates the aporia of trauma and invites new perspectives on the relationship between fiction and reality as it consciously creates spaces of possibility. In volume III of his seminal work *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricœur equally argues that “resolving the aporias poetically is not so much to dissolve them as to rid them of their paralyzing effect and to make them productive” (139). What he states in the context of fiction more broadly is even more applicable to magical realism. Magical realism creates these spaces of possibility not necessarily by relating the reader's reality to the surreal (as for example suggested by Hegerfeldt 55; Ricœur, *Time III* 159), but by presenting the reader with two distinct realities which she is able to categorise as realistic and non-realistic. Rushdie describes his agenda as follows: “A form must be created which allows the miraculous and the mundane to co-exist at the same level – as the same order of event” (“In God We Trust” 376). He thus follows an almost Borgesian agenda. “History – not that fabricated by governments, journalists, or those whom Borges acidly calls ‘professionals of patriotism’ – is something secret, or perhaps something so strange we cannot see it”, which is why

Borges advocates a kind of representation that “does not pretend to make everything visible, or that does not attempt to conquer the ‘invisible’ as well as the ‘visible things’” (Jenckes 107). Like Benjamin, but also like Sebald and Rushdie, Borges criticises the idea of a universal history in favour of a style that allows for and points at the gap – a traumatic style that allows for the voiceless to disturb the unified narrative.

After some initial thoughts on the definition of magical realism, this section will show how in magical realism genre and subject interact in a dialectical approach regarding temporalities, narrative situation, and style, which – albeit in a different form – we also know from Sebald and Borges (Eckart 516). Three subsections will explain this dialectical understanding in more detail: firstly through an exploration of magical realism’s epistemological and ontological concerns, secondly through an analysis of the East-West binary which is often ascribed to magical realism, and thirdly through a deconstruction of the East-West binary specifically where it is concerned with conceptions of time. Of particular interest will be Romila Thapar’s article “Cyclic and Linear Time in Early India”, as her elaborations on temporality and progress from a traditional, Indian perspective might seem un-European at first, but in fact go hand in hand with Borges’s refutation and Sebald’s pessimism of time and history. The link between notions of time and reality has already been established above and will here also be helpful to trace a shift in the definition of truth in *Midnight’s Children*. When reality will have once more been established as a linguistic construction, two further subsections will look at gossip and literal metaphor as creative techniques for tackling the problem of the impossibility of linguistically expressing historical trauma.

In the last fifteen years a number of researchers have attempted to define magical realism. The outcome was usually a rather long but never fully comprehensive list of essential and optional features that concludes with the question of whether magical realism can be considered a subcategory of postcolonialism or postmodernism. In *Magical Realism and Deleuze: The Indiscernibility of Difference in Postcolonial Literature*, Eva Aldea traces key texts by William Spindler, Jean-Pierre Durix, Wendy Faris, to Amaryll Beatrice Chanady and many more in order to give an overview of the current research situation and to find a minimum definition. Most of the established theories centre around what seem to be two key characteristics of magical realism: firstly the relationship

between the supernatural and the realistic world, and secondly the matter-of-fact style. However, magical realism's relationship to the fantastic, the question of whether the magical part needs to be anchored in a non-Western culture and whether magical realism is itself political, remain unclear. Aldea sees the need for an "inversion of common approaches to magical realism in order to privilege ontology over anthropology, or text over context" (17). Christopher Warnes shows how even more fundamentally, it is not clear what is actually defined: a mode, movement, agenda, or genre of fiction? (2). While Warnes then offers a "basic definition of magical realism [...] as a mode of narration that naturalises or normalises the supernatural" (3), Chanady and Robert R. Wilson, for example, insist on the importance of the magical and realistic worlds to be kept separate. Following Aldea again, the magic in magical realism "does not conform to the world-view of the realist narrator, whether it be supernatural or simply implausible" (15). Questions remain nevertheless as to what constitutes reality and the real in magical realism and on which level of the text the recognition of and hesitation between the real and the supernatural has to take place. These debates show that magical realism is primarily marked as inherently dialectical. The dialectical polarity, as I use the term of dialectics, is not resolved or overcome in a synthesis. Nevertheless this polarity is not a negative one, highlighting the dialogue that takes place between these two poles. The dialectical as it also concerns magical realism is thus dynamic and open to participation, change, and revision. Ricœur already characterised the mere act of reading as dialectical, in which he describes reading as firstly "a picnic where the author brings the words and the readers the meaning", secondly "a lack of determinacy but also an excess of meaning", and thirdly ambivalently distanced, as reading involves admitting "a certain degree of illusion" while the text's "polysemantism [...] negates all the reader's attempts to adhere to the text and to its instructions" (Ricœur, *Time III* 168–69). A balance, so Ricœur, is never achieved. His third point is particularly relevant to the discussion of magical realism as equally accommodating fantastic and realistic modes of writing, as well as to the impossible task for the reader of clearly positioning the text and its events within the two modes. These dialectic features are natural to magical realism due to its epistemological and ontological mode as well as its East/West binary. I argue that the resolution of magic is not an essential qualifier for magical realism as its dialectical nature denies such a fixation. Magical realism is itself something 'in

between', something that is 'all at once' and can therefore instigate a plurality and diversity, offering a platform for the other and hybridity. As a genre, in other words, it acts out the content it mediates.

With regard to trauma theory, magical realism is particularly interesting because it does not try to resolve its formal contradiction. The two contrasting world views are not presented as a violation of the rules of the text, which does not imply that the contrast disappears or is dissolved. This refusal of a resolution might be a fruitful approach to the notion of unspeakability in trauma studies: the contradiction is not resolved but accommodated (Adams with reference to Hegerfeldt, 10). At the same time magical realism works against trauma's hitherto narrow Eurocentric focus, undermining realism's status as the "privileged discursive mode of Western rationalism" (Adams 12). When Rushdie demands that a "form must be created which allows the miraculous and the mundane to co-exist at the same level" ("In God We Trust" 376), we might be able to find it in magical realism. Magical realism is thus another example of where post-Holocaust discourse and postcolonialism intersect and can fruitfully be applied to each other, as they both question established notions of truth and reality.

#### THE EPISTEMOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY OF MAGICAL REALISM

The first dialectical relationship to be explored concerns the epistemological and ontological modes of writing. As has been observed in all previous chapters already, a lot of post-Second World War writing describes the unspeakable and unthinkable nature of the Holocaust and puts epistemological thinking to the test. Epistemology, commonly known as the theory of knowledge, explores questions such as "What can we know?" and "How can we know it?", which are at the core of issues concerning the possibility or impossibility of non-eyewitnesses to know what happened in the concentration camps. The dominant discipline of history tries to give accounts that are as objective as possible, relying on facts through documents and eyewitness reports. These attempts, however, are non-objective in two ways: firstly because documentary material and reports are themselves narratives and thus perspectivalised, and secondly with regard to the product the historian creates, which is a subjective narrative, too. The recognition of this subjective nature heightens the importance of oral history projects. While researchers are well aware that these collected stories might be flawed as memory might deviate from the factual truth



of what actually happened, this flawedness and deviation are also recognised as memory's nature: each recording presents one truth, regardless of how flawed it might be from the historian's perspective. Current discussions of the role of fiction in this debate about objectivity and subjectivity lead to constructivism and the assumption that beliefs and concepts are merely constructed. It does not solve, but only defers the hesitation between an objective basis and one based on subjective beliefs and attitudes, but it nevertheless presents a more inclusive approach that allows deviation from singular and universal claims. If the three conditions for knowledge are truthfulness, someone who is convinced of this truthfulness and sufficient evidence or reasons to be convinced (Prechtel and Burkard 145), then this evidence does not necessarily need to lie in the Western, empirical sciences.

However, just because the Holocaust is often the unspeakable and unthinkable in these postmemory times and because therefore it might seem difficult to put it into the category of realism, it does not side with the magical as an opposition to realism. It cannot side with the magical, but it cannot oppose it either even though the Holocaust obviously did take place in reality. The Holocaust originated in a past reality but is only perceivable today through its after-effects and not in the form of an authentic re-experience. The Holocaust is thus a moment in the dialectical relationship between the magical – in the broadest sense as that which is not realistic – and the realistic. This magical realist notion of the Holocaust cannot be clearly pinned down; its relative position to each pole shifts depending on how heavy the pull of one of the two sides is. On the one side there is a critical investigation of what can be known: a concern shared by post-Second World War studies and magical realism. Magical realism not only introduces the wondrous and the fantastic as a non-conflictual but unexplained element, but it also might as well present every-day life in a magical way. Warnes distinguishes between these two approaches as “discursive” and “faith-based” magical realism. In the latter case, the reader is estranged or defamiliarised from her realistic worldview as it is disclosed as a linguistic construction. Magical realism then becomes “a form of epistemological scepticism, a productive fictional mode of critique” (Warnes 6). Yet “discursive magical realism [also] deliberately elevates the non-real to the status of the real in order to cast the epistemological status of both into doubt” (Warnes 14); in Anne C. Hegerfeldt's words, the magical and abstract is presented as real, and as material which links magical realism to epistemological theories

“which similarly argue that reality cannot be restricted to the empirically perceivable” (253). Jenni Adams highlights what Warnes labels faith-based magical realism with regard to the Holocaust and its status as unthinkable and incomprehensible. Revealing the “real as miraculous [...] destabilizes the categories of the real and unreal as a result of its inconceivable nature” (Adams 10), and Anne C. Hegerfeldt adds that “far from denying the reality of such events, the fantastic tone conveys a heightened sense of despair over that fact that, tragically, they are only all too possible” (61). This is most clearly reflected in the language problem that is often explicitly addressed in the texts, as I have already set out in the introduction. The frustration experienced by Sebald’s characters and the awareness of linguistic problems that come with a taboo is also experienced by Sebald himself. In *Luftkrieg und Literatur* Sebald raves against expressions that conceal and neutralise “die über das Fassungsvermögen gehenden Erlebnisse” (34). The continuation of normal language is to Sebald a reason to doubt the authenticity of what is reported (35). If he explores new stylistic paths through the documentary style, the alternative route lies in the juxtaposition of the magical and the realistic.

These fundamentally epistemological issues, however, also affect wider ontological issues, which Abel Pablo Iannone summarises with the following question: “How can epistemological requirements be prior to ontological ones?” (178). It is thus difficult to see epistemology as the counterpart to ontology as J.F. Ferrier, for example, suggests. Hegerfeldt explicitly calls magical realism “a literature of the real insofar as it scrutinizes and recreates the experience of living in a complex and frequently confusing world” (7). As also the language crisis shows, Western rationalism is not able to explain the experience of the world, which, as Hegerfeldt rightly points out, not only concerns former colonies but also Western cultures (7). Tracing the development of ontology, one notices that the ‘theory of being’ used to include the divine, which is reflected in the name of the higher category of metaphysics. This broader understanding of ontology can also take the magical into consideration, as the magical, too, is part of the universe. This claim is based on the assumption that there is the possibility of a world which does not need to be perceived by the senses in order to exist. This world is limited, however, to the abilities of the imagination, which is itself strongly dependent on experience and the physically perceivable world. Magical realism can test,

arguably even cross, these limits by creating or trying to create realities through the imagination.

Following Brian McHale's definition of postmodernism, magical realism leaves here the terrain of the modernists and transforms into a postmodernist mode of writing. This is aptly addressed by Aldea in her work on Deleuze and magical realism when she draws on Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of becoming with the world and which also reflects Borges's idea of reality: "We are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it. Everything is vision, becoming. We become universes. Becoming animal, plant, molecular, becoming zero" (Deleuze and Guattari in Aldea 61). If we take earlier considerations on constructions of reality into account, magical realism is the mode of writing to take these ideas to their limits. Understanding ontology as the conceptualisation of a world, magical realism first presents the reader with different ontologies in the text only to make her then question these ontologies. To Adams the possibility of addressing taboo topics through magical realism is thus structurally paired with realism and the magical as two "contradictory ontological worldviews [that] are never hierarchically resolved" (58–59). In a second step, this newly acquired scepticism might then be transferred to extra-textual reality. It is especially this crossing of the boundaries between ontologies and the question of what is carried over from one world to another that makes magical realism an ontological and thus postmodern mode. This crossing and carrying over is itself an act of the creation of a reality, as without this process of crossing the otherness of the second reality would not be perceived. This brings us back to the importance of metaphor on the one hand, which I will deal with toward the end of this chapter, and to the understanding of magical realism as primarily dialectical on the other hand.

#### THE EAST/WEST BINARY

The second dialectical feature of magical realism concerns the attribution of its two name-giving elements to Eastern and Western styles respectively. These associations, however, are subverted and deconstructed by Rushdie's magical realism itself: Borges's use of "tradition to deconstruct tradition and order to subvert order" (Sieber 204) has already been discussed above in detail; a similar agenda can be observed in magical realism. Magical realism "draws upon the conventions of both realism and fantasy or folktale, yet does so in such a way that

neither of these two realms is able to assert a greater claim of truth than the other” (Warnes 2). According to Aldea, it is realistic in the sense that it has a clear setting, follows a linear progression of time, “does not break with the basic principles of the regime of signs that realism exemplifies”, and presents the state as ordering principle (58–59). She recognises the magical for example in premonitions and omens and it “involves a deterritorialization of meaning” as well as a lack of identity (59). This is one possibility of addressing the two name-giving aspects that define magical realism. In the ambition to define magical realism by differentiating it from what it is not, i.e. neighbouring categories, many researchers are led to Tzvetan Todorov’s fantastic literature and the concept of hesitation. Todorov bases the fantastic in the notion of reality as the reader has to decide if an event can be real or not. This decision on the side of the reader is necessary but at the same time removes the text from the category of fantastic literature:

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (Todorov 136)

Fantastic literature thus allows the reader to find an explanation and integrate the events into a coherent world view and narrative: either in a magical or in a realistic world always based on the reader’s judgment which is formed on the basis of her extra-textual worldview. This resolution is not necessary in magical realist texts as the two possible worlds coexist. Magical realism brings Todorov’s reader and her realistic world into the text by presenting it as one of the two worlds. If these worlds were not on the same diegetic level, the text would be fantastic rather than magical realist. The reader, according to Todorov, finds herself in a realistic setting and applies conventions attributed to realism, a literary movement associated with Western traditions. The “laws of nature” suggest a scientific and empirical approach to the world and a clear true/false dichotomy, elevating Western scientific thinking over the spiritual and intuitive. This issue about realism as a Western period and style is also a point of criticism that Kim Sasser raises against Chanady’s Eurocentric view on magical realism, according to which “[th]e reader is presupposed to ally with rationalism, the worldview seen to be represented by realism” (Sasser 23). In an increasingly globalised era and the time of world

literature, such statements reveal the importance for a heightened cultural awareness. As Sasser rightly observes, it would be a mistake to suppose “on the one hand that all formerly colonized peoples adhere to a supernatural worldview, and, on the other, that people from formerly colonizing nations (Anglo-Europeans) adhere to a rationalist, and conversely antisupernaturalist or rationalist, worldview” (23). The magical does not need to be geographically locatable and interpretations about the reader’s real world should only be drawn if the text offers extra-textual references. Rather than imposing her own worldview on the text, the reader is supposed to apply the new worldview to her reality in order to see it from a different perspective and thus create another truth.

Although a magical realist text might be written entirely without reference to existing Eastern cultures, the East and West dichotomy in magical realist writing is a crucial dialectical element. If magical realism does not explicitly address this dichotomy, it does so implicitly by questioning Western/realistic (literary) traditions. These traditions are used and criticised at the same time so that magical realist texts reveal a different attitude towards the West to that of earlier decolonisation writers: there is no simple East/West dichotomy anymore, neither politically nor aesthetically in magical realism; its use also contrasts “with the deployment of narrative magic to construct mythic cultural roots for the nations or regions of their birth, in short to construct nationalism/regionalism” (Sasser 10). Theo D’haen traces the East-West debate back to Borges and earlier modernist developments of magical realism in surrealism. While he considers it a mistake to call Borges a magical realist, he positions him closer to postmodernism with the “same promise of severance between the world and the word” (286). Borges’s shared ambition with magical realism, according to D’haen, is the impression of the writer “turning rationalism against the short-comings of the rational representation of reality” (286), echoing Sieber’s earlier observation about Borges’s deconstruction of tradition and order. “With surrealism, with European magic realism and with Borges, language is used to constitute another reality beyond western commonsense reality – a reality that therefore, by definition is *not* there in the western view, i.e. it is and remains truly *sur-real*” (D’haen 286–87, italics in the original). D’haen then goes back to early definitions of magical realism by Alejo Carpentier, who also rightly observed that Western reality is not universal and needs qualification. A Western mode of writing fails to grasp another reality. This other

reality “can only be described in the language of western ‘un-reason,’ via faith or magic” so that “there opens up the possibility of a critique of western culture and its discursive formations *from the outside*” (D’haen 287, italics in the original). While earlier modernist magical realism was “confined to the geographical periphery of the Western world”, present-day magical realism broadens the notion of the margin and operates “if not [from the] geographical then social, economic, and political” margins” (D’haen 289). Such a development also reflects Rushdie’s own understanding of magical realism in his essay on Gabriel García Márquez, whose “magic realism [...] is a development of Surrealism that expresses a genuinely ‘Third World’ consciousness” (“Márquez” 301). This consciousness includes postcolonial topics in a wider sense such as dealing with half-made societies, the old struggling against the new, and authorities of wealth that hide truths to maintain their power. D’haen further sums up that magical realism “is now the preferred mode for all postcolonial writing, including writers not just from former European colonies, but also from ethnic minorities in the United States and elsewhere, and women” (289). Hegerfeldt draws the reader’s attention to voices that are less optimistic than D’haen or herself with regard to magical realism beyond the (post)colonial. These voices argue that from the hand of First World Writers, “postcolonial critique becomes pure postmodern playfulness, ex-centricity a pose – in short, magic realism deteriorates into a cliché”; they call the separation of “magic realism from a postcolonial context of production [...] a renewed act of quasi-colonial appropriation” (3). It would be difficult to include, for example, David Mitchell’s, Jonathan Safran Foer’s, or Markus Zusak’s works in a discussion of magical realism if we strictly follow those narrow views on magical realism.

This perspective on magical realism and its elements as primarily dialectical has also been addressed by Adams, who chooses to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism to describe similar observations: dialogism as it applies to magical realism “places itself in the context of other utterances, subjectivities and worldviews” and “is both unfinalizable and anti-totalizing” (56). This explains the absence of judgement on the veracity and authenticity of what is described in and by the text (Sasser 22), so that magical realism can be considered an inclusive and ex-centric (Adams 13) style. The mode of writing reflects the postcolonial agenda that is often loosely attributed to magical realism; postcolonialism can here be understood as the process of independence of the colonised from the coloniser, but

also in a wider context as concerned with plurality, diversity, hybridity, and heterogeneousness (Adams 13). Some researchers stress that magical realism needs to be situated in a different cultural context, be it an eastern cultural context to represent the colonial world on the one hand and the magical elements on the other or any ex-centric culture to represent those broader issues of postcolonialism (Delbeare 98).

Trying not to mute but to reconcile the debates around magical realism as a postcolonial or postmodern mode of writing, D'haen, following ideas by Kwame Anthony Appiah, suggests that the 'post' in the different theories are the same. Others aim at showing how postmodernism and postcolonialism merely mix in magical realism: in her survey, which includes a specific section on postmodernism and postcolonialism, Aldea summarises Brenda Cooper's approach, in which she attributes magical realism's themes to postcolonialism and its style, characterised for example by pastiche, irony, parody, and intertextuality, to postmodernism. Aldea, however, wonders how Cooper would contrast magical realism to "any kind of writing that attempts to find a 'third way' of seeing things through a mix of postcolonial themes and postmodern techniques" (6). Sasser quotes Wendy Faris when she speaks of an intersection of postcolonialism and postmodernism in magical realism as manifested in its performativity, metafictionality, and shifting references without the need for an indigenous source (13). At the point of intersection the two developments share the fact that they "include any writer/text resistant toward tyranny of diverse kinds" (13). Sasser acknowledges the difficulty of bringing postcolonialism and postmodernism together without being able to distinguish them clearly, which expresses a more fundamental problem of defining the two terms in question in the first place. Aldea can only repeat her criticism initially raised about Cooper's approach: Faris does not make it clear either how certain postcolonial and postmodern characteristics are specific to magical realism (9). Rather than focusing on shared features, Linda Hutcheon focuses on shared concerns, so that magical realism is a conjunction of postmodernism and postcolonialism to Hutcheon as well. Aldea summarises these shared concerns raised by Hutcheon as the marginal and ex-centricity (9). Thus a political agenda enters the competition. It now does not come as a surprise that Mac Fenwick's definition of postcolonialism can almost also be read as a definition of postmodernism, if the word "imperialist" is omitted:

Post (with or without the hyphen) colonialism is about questioning accepted truths; it is dedicated to opening up new fields of inquiry in old literatures, and to providing a space for previously ignored voices; it is anti-hegemonic, anti-hierarchical and anti-canonical. It is not post-structuralism; it is – or ought to be – politically committed. Above all else, post/colonialism (to dispense with the hyphenated/non-hyphenated debate altogether) is dedicated to the proposition that the world cannot be rightly or properly understood according to the old imperialist terms of “us and them,” centre and margin, right and wrong: binary opposition is to be abandoned, and a more flexible and relational form of understanding and interpretation is to be embraced. (Fenwick 45)

His first remark concerns the hyphen between ‘post’ and ‘colonialism’ and is later picked up again when he replaces the hyphen with a dash, implying that the issue at hand is not merely about colonialism or postcolonialism but also, and in this context perhaps most importantly, about ‘post’ in conjunction with another term (or indeed on its own). Parts of this definition, such as “questioning accepted truths” and “opening up new fields of enquiry”, are so broad that they apply to all literary periods when they first emerge. Providing a platform for previously ignored voices and anti-hegemony not only applies to the ‘post’s but also to feminism(s) as well as to civil rights and freedom movements in general. The same is true for the wish to abolish said binary oppositions, which is not necessarily incompatible with postmodernism’s fragmentation and unstable identities. The opposition is to be abolished, but the binary character can be turned into Fenwick’s flexible, relational, and interpretable ‘post’, highlighting the importance of interaction on an individual and subjective level – an accessibility also promoted by the texts looked at here in the context of transnational memory studies. Thus, magical realism does not have to be either Eastern or Western, postcolonial or postmodern, but can rather be both, as they are two sides of the same coin and in a dialectical relationship to one another. D’haen also understands this dialectical relationship as a fruitful and supplementing one rather than one of negation (291), an attitude which will receive further attention in the following subsection on time in magical realism and *Midnight’s Children*.

#### EASTERN VS. WESTERN TIME?

In her search for a distinct magical realist style in Holocaust literature, Adams heavily focuses on the depiction of time and the disruption of chronology – an area that has already had importance in the second chapter on Sebald. It can serve as an



example again here to look at the mechanisms behind the magical realist traditions especially regarding trauma and the Second World War. Adams identifies the breakdown of chronology as an important concept in both magical realist texts and trauma fiction centring around the Holocaust with the difference, however, that magical realism can “render productive the temporal aporias” (112). Trauma is characterised by the “circularity of post-Holocaust time for its survivors, both in the recurrence of Holocaust (a)temporality [...] and in the directedness of post-Holocaust time not forwards towards the future but always back towards the event itself” (Adams 118). She further links this circularity to historical inevitability and “multiple (and conflicting) perspectives towards history” (121). These conclusions can be reached by defining the inevitable as a combination of trauma – including the Holocaust or feelings of helplessness, the notion of the unthinkable, or more broadly something that exceeds what can be thought possible – and subjectivity; it is the atrocity and how it is individually experienced and perceived as a temporal phenomenon.

Temporally magical realism as a mode of writing for Holocaust literature is characterised, according to Adams, by a “spiral figuration of repetition *within forwards movements*”, for which she draws on Brenda Cooper’s concept of third time (Adams 121, italics in the original). She thus sees magical realism as a postcolonial concept that is also concerned with postmodernist ontological issues. The link between temporality and ontology and its power to create has already been established by Ricœur for fiction in general, when he states that “[e]ach fictive temporal experience unfolds its world, and each of these worlds is singular, incomparable, unique” (Ricœur, *Time III* 128). In his analysis of *Mrs Dalloway*, Ricœur then shows how the different experiences of time lead to different realities: lived presents and quasi-presents (Ricœur, *Time III* 133). In the following I will add some thoughts on the cultural aspect to complement Adams’s work, which was not able to fully address the Eurocentric side of this issue on time before applying these to *Midnight’s Children*: the magical realist mode with what at first seems like another unreliable narrator, as in *Austerlitz*, is ultimately revealed as a mode which is able to accommodate a multitude of different concepts of time.

It should be mentioned again that part of the education brought to the colony by the coloniser was also the idea of linear time. This implied historical awareness that is defined as linear and eschatological – time and history are conceptually

strongly interwoven (Thapar 27). Looking at the example of early India, Thapar shows how at the time of colonisation, the Indian notion of time as cyclical “preclude[d] a sense of history, a view which contributed to the theory that Indian civilisation was ahistorical” (27). Such views denied India the ability to differentiate between myth and history as well as the possibility of progress and development (Thapar 28). The early Indian measurement of time was based on seasons and rituals; the concept of time goes far beyond what can be measured: the *kalpa* is “infinite and immeasurable” and “begins with the creation and continues until the ultimate cataclysmic destruction of the world” (Thapar 30). We might attribute 4320 million years to the *kalpa*, such a length, however, is impossible to measure and thus time is almost negated. Part of the *kalpa* are further smaller cycles: great cycles (*mahayuga*) consist of four lesser cycles (*yugas*), although these four cycles do not need to have equal length (Thapar 31). This spiral movement of the Indian time cycles evokes Adams spiral figuration of magical realism. Thapar now continues to show that the European view of time as linear and the early Indian view are not entirely incompatible and exclusive: the cycles, for example, are not identical so that new events can indeed happen. There is also a form of progress or development: “The circle does not return to the beginning but moves into the next and smaller one. Such a continuity of circles could be stretched to a spiral, a wave or even perhaps a not very straight line” (Thapar 32). Having now established the potential linearity of early Indian concepts of time, we can also recognise a Benjaminian or Sebaldian view of a declining history and society. “The first and largest *yuga* encapsulated the golden age at its start, but subsequently there is a gradual decline in each age, culminating in the degeneration characteristic of the present Kali age” (Thapar 32).

Another linearity Thapar identifies is generational time. The great Flood (a myth about the lineage of the ruling clans according to which Vishnu appears as a fish and safely guides the ruler Manu through the flood) or wars might function as time-markers – one of which in the Indian context can certainly be the moment of independence and Partition. Here the Indian notion of time itself moves away from myth towards a more Western understanding: “There is a distinct beginning from after the Flood and an equally distinct determination in the war. The arrow of time moves steadily through the generations and to the battlefield” (Thapar 36). Linear time in a historiographic sense can also be found in chronicles, legal documents and

biographies and Thapar describes the linear in relation to cyclic time “almost as if a segment of the cycle is stretched to a more linear form” (42). The linearity of time is thus not an entirely Western concept. It is rather, as Rushdie also suggests, analogous to “the idea of the nation” (“In God We Trust” 382): the documents which demonstrate linearity in the Indian understanding of time are “inscriptions issued by a variety of rulers, officials and others. They frequently narrate, even if briefly, the chronological and sequential history of a dynasty” and the chronicles and regional histories, called *vamshavalis*, translate literally as “the path of succession” (Thapar 39; 41).

Through Rushdie’s essay “In God We Trust”, it can also be seen how Western concepts of time have not always been solely linear but also featured simultaneity, which is not to be equated with Indian cyclic time, but can count as a deviation from a strict view on Western time concepts as exclusively linear. These thoughts on time and temporality are linked to religion and the nation:

Time, in the imagined community of Christendom, was held to be near its end; and also contained the idea of simultaneity – God’s eye could see all moments, past, present and future, so that the here and now was only part of the eternal. Benjamin call this “Messianic time”. Our modern concept of time, by contrast, is guided by ticking clocks. It moves forward. It is a “homogeneous, empty time”, in Benjamin's phrase. And, says Anderson, “the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation.” (Rushdie, “In God We Trust” 381–82)

Rushdie promotes a simultaneous understanding of time and to a certain degree reflects the idea of timelessness presented in the figure of God. The second kind of time mirrors Sebald’s critique of capitalism and Walter Benjamin can be seen as a point of reference for all three writers: Sebald, Borges, and Rushdie. Borges, too, recognises an immediate link between time and capitalism, which he exemplifies with the British colonisation of India. In his essay “The Penultimate Version of Reality”, “Borges considers the concept of a single and unifying time as a kind of imperialism” (Jenckes 104). Rushdie also disapproves of time as a linear succession of events as “empty.” In its quest for progress, so Rushdie, the Western political system has failed to deliver what it promised and thus, as progress does not happen, lost the future (“In God We Trust” 388). The debate follows a postcolonial agenda by addressing limitations of progress and linearity and attributing them to the nation

and the power of the state. Rushdie, however, – and this is a crucial difference to Sebald and Borges, for whom “the possibility of linear time is nullified” (Donnelly 78), – does not entirely dismiss linear time, but rather sees it as a different truth:

But writers insist, if they’re any good, in having it both ways – to be both linear and Godlike, to express both the truths of simultaneity and those of linearity. John Berger has said that Man is two events: there is the event of his biology and the event of his consciousness. The first is linear, temporal. The second is simultaneous, multiform, protean. (“In God We Trust” 382)

Even more than Sebald, Rushdie highlights the importance of the peaceful coexistence of different truths, and he does so, like Sebald and Borges, through elaborations on a theory of time. In *Midnight’s Children* one can see how these theoretical thoughts are integrated into the realm of the fictional in order to prove how definitions of truth, reality and objectivity do not have clear-cut boundaries. The protean nature of time and writing emphasises their creative and productive nature. In their versatility they adapt to shifting contexts, reinventing themselves and consequently contributing to the shift of their own environment themselves, as is also the case in *Midnight’s Children*.

The novel opens with the narrator struggling to find the right first words:

I was born in the city of Bombay ... once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it's important to be more ... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. (MC 3)

The main reason for his difficulties in starting writing is centred around the importance of time, of course more precisely around the narrator’s day and time of birth, which coincide with the partition and independence of India and Pakistan. The first reference to time, however, seems to be completely unrelated to this event: “once upon a time” introduces the genre of the fairy tale. Even though what will follow is not a fairy tale – and the narrator immediately dismisses this attempt – it nevertheless opens the stage for wondrous and fantastical elements. The fairy tale formula also introduces the notion of something atemporal: while the story might be told as if it had happened in a distant past, it is also a story of universal and contemporary significance. By looking for the precise date, however, the narrator

Saleem tries to place it in a specific historical context, showing that this is indeed a narrative about a certain event in a distinct place which even the reader of the novel could look up and relate to. Midnight then supposedly marks the precise time of his birth and of independence, linking Saleem's personal fate and the state for the first time. What the reader only learns later in the novel is a curious detail about the time change with the partition of India: "With Partition the clocks in Pakistan run half an hour ahead of their Indian counterparts" (Clingman 114). Temporal confusion in Rushdie's novel thus starts with the very first sentences.

The narrator finds himself in a state of urgency: "Now, however, time (having no further use for me) is running out" (MC 3). He believes that he is falling apart, cracking, and disintegrating (MC 43). Before the narrator crumbles into dust, he wants to write down his story, "before I forget. (We are a nation of forgetters.)" (MC 43). His autobiographical project is thus directly linked to an intended readership, which – if this readership is a whole nation – implies a political ambition. A recurrent image is thus that of the countdown and of ticking clocks, starting with Earl Mountbatten's countdown calendar before Partition (MC 120) which is also the countdown to the narrator's birth (MC 123). The first book of *Midnight's Children* peaks in Saleem's birth which explains why the ticking of this personal countdown drowns Mountbatten's one: "another sound is swelling now, deafening, insistent; the sound of seconds passing of an approaching, inevitable midnight" (MC 141). Another countdown concerns the deaths of a lot of Saleem's family members: "the clock is ticking now; and because all countdowns require a zero, let me state that the end came on September 22nd, 1965; and that the precise instant of the arrival-at-zero was, inevitably, the stroke of midnight" (MC 454). The date is a prolepsis as well as another extra-textual reference – the reader will learn, however, to treat them with caution. The narrator Saleem also explicitly addresses the inevitability of all events: it is not a coincidence that the major events and turning points in the novel occur on 15 August or at midnight but a logical relation. "Tick tock" in brackets or italics that are syntactically not linked to the surrounding text remind the reader of the countdown of the (time)bomb and, in the manner of Frank Kermode's *Sense of an Ending*, that the "genesis of 'tick'" is followed by the "apocalypse of 'tock'" (192). A later countdown, whose start is also followed by reminders of "tick tock" throughout the chapter "A wedding", leads up to the birth of the narrator's son Aadam Sinai – again a birth linked to the state of India and

Indira Gandhi's Emergency laws, censorship and civil rights cuts. The novel ends with the narrator's personal countdown again; as his cracks widen, he is waiting for midnight and the celebrations of Independence Day but this future is purely the result of his imagination – "one jar must remain empty" (MC 645). These many countdowns suggest that time is running out. It must be an object that is only available in a limited amount and that progressively minimises. However, what might at first then seem like a linear time concept, is overturned by the novel to a more cyclical understanding of time.

The countdown of Aadam's birth is presented as a repetition of previous events:

once again a child was to be born to a father who was not his father, although by a terrible irony the child would be the true grandchild to his father's parents; trapped in the web of these interweaving genealogies, it may even have occurred to me to wonder what was beginning, what was ending, [...]. (MC 580)

"Once again" leads us back to the novel's beginning and the narrator's own life story. By addressing the ironic situation of the true grandparents, one might think that order is now re-established. However, there is no reason to believe that the web is now destroyed; the genealogies are still interwoven and the narrator's final questions in this quotation show that a cyclical or even spiral understanding of time must be at work: very much in the spirit of T.S. Eliot's "East Coker", in his end is his beginning. Another example is Aadam's mother Parvati, who, in order to get married, has to convert to Islam and change her name:

she took a name which I chose for her out of the repository of my dreams, becoming Laylah, night, so that she too was caught up in the repetitive cycles of my history; [...] like my own mother Amina Sinai, Parvati-the-witch became a new person in order to have a child. (MC 580)

History repeats itself not just for Saleem the narrator but also the figures around him, linking their fate, too, to that of the state. Rushdie even repeats the same phrases for the birth of the narrator's son, only changing the place, name, and time.

He was born in Old Delhi ... once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: Aadam Sinai arrived at a night-shadowed slum on June 25th, 1975. And the time? The time matters, too. As I said: at night. No, it's important to be more ... On the stroke of midnight, as a

matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at Emergency, he emerged. (MC 586)

Independence has been replaced by Emergency, bringing with it a wordplay the original of the opening could not deliver. The reader knows now that the son will follow in his father's steps and also that the connection between private life and the political is not limited to singular figures. Fenwick has a more optimistic outlook by insisting that through the cycles as "repetitions with difference" there is a "hope for a better future, even for improvement" (63). He links this to the fact that Saleem's son is and is not his (biological) son. However, this constellation itself is a repetition so that Saleem's own pessimistic view on the Kali-Yuga cycles predominates.

The narrator's thoughts on time culminate in feverish musings on Old Indian and Brahman concepts. By doing so he relativises not only his own story but also those concepts developed by the different cultural groups, showing that often it is merely a matter of perspective:

Think of this: history, in my version, entered a new phase on August 15th, 1947—but in another version, that inescapable date is no more than one fleeting instant in the Age of Darkness, Kali-Yuga, in which the cow of morality has been reduced to standing, teeteringly, on a single leg! Kali-Yuga—the losing throw in our national dice-game; the worst of everything; the age when property gives a man rank, when wealth is equated with virtue, when passion becomes the sole bond between men and women, when falsehood brings success (is it any wonder, in such a time, that I too have been confused about good and evil?) ... began on Friday, February 18th, 3102 B.C.; and will last a mere 432,000 years! Already feeling somewhat dwarfed, I should add nevertheless that the Age of Darkness is only the fourth phase of the present Maha-Yuga cycle which is, in total, ten times as long; and when you consider that it takes a thousand Maha-Yugas to make just one Day of Brahma, you'll see what I mean about proportion. (MC 269)

The narrator asks for humility (from Padma or the reader?) but in the process experiences another vertigo. Tradition can offer guidance in an ever faster world, but can also make someone feel small and overwhelmed as might be the case here with the feverish Saleem. Recognising the decline in the Kali-Yuga cycles he immediately links it to a critique of capitalism. Old Indian or Brahman time concepts thus do not offer an alternative to capitalist linearity but have become its accomplices. An even darker verdict follows: "But it is Kali-Yuga; the children of

the hour of darkness were born, I'm afraid, in the midst of the age of darkness; so that although we found it easy to be brilliant, we were always confused about being good" (MC 277). Reflecting on the age they find themselves in, Saleem is just as pessimistic as Sebald or Benjamin seem to be in their works. The novel is now linked to the ethical, and the "age of darkness" can be understood as exceeding the Indian subcontinent and including further darkness and evil of the twentieth century across the globe. This does not mean that the narrator makes universally valid claims but rather that he points at similar developments and shared problems elsewhere that are precisely not isolated but interwoven. In this context, guilt, a key concept in post-Second World War discourse, is brought up in the episode about Saleem's time in the army in "the time of punishment" (MC 507). Suffering from the atrocities seen and committed, the group of soldiers defers traumatic images onto the magical forest. They are absorbed by these images and have become "shadows of the people they had once been" (MC 507). Saleem, already suffering from amnesia and now being the buddha, loses his identity a second time. By entering the magical world of the jungle, war is revealed as truly absurd: "the chase, which had begun far away in the real world, acquired in the altered light of the Sundarbans a quality of absurd fantasy which enabled them to dismiss it once and for all" (MC 506). Realities have been switched and here in the dream-like jungle we can see that the narrator's point of view is not automatically linked to the (Western) real. The jungle of the Sundarbans stands for trauma and the (a)temporal. Saleem, here the buddha, is followed by a peasant with a scythe because he "[c]ouldn't keep his hands off the local women" (MC 501). The peasant is also referred to as "Father Time"; he is shot by Ayooba and "time lies dead in a rice-paddy" (MC 501). The group's journey on the river becomes further disorienting: having the task of finding someone they start to feel as if they were the ones running away. Having "murdered the hours and forgotten the date" they are entering the Sundarbans jungle "which is so thick that history has hardly ever found the way in" (MC 501). After the death of time, represented in the dead peasant with the scythe, they are swallowed up by the thick jungle and have found temporary refuge from the mad world of reality in the dream-like jungle. As a place of "historyless anonymity" (MC 502), however, the traumatic war images fill the void so that the jungle too turns hostile.



This negative view on both Western and Old Indian time in *Midnight's Children* reminds us of Sebald's and also Borges's negation of time. It is in fact again a clock tower that objectifies a similar train of thought in Rushdie's novel. The first reference to the clock tower is made by Amina, the narrator's mother. Looking back at her pregnancy she says that "it was like time had come to a complete stop. The baby in my stomach stopped the clocks. I'm sure of that. Don't laugh: you remember the clocktower at the end of the hill? I'm telling you, after that monsoon it never worked again" (MC 134). It becomes the "tower of crippled hours" and a place of "the solitude of rusting time" (MC 239). Alone there, the tower becomes for Saleem the place of creative explorations: he became a creator of "multitudinous realities", having "entered into the illusion of the artist" (MC 241). After Joseph D'Costa had used the clock tower for an arsenal for explosives, his capture made time slow down again for Amina (MC 200). What was the symbol for traumatic anger in Sebald's *Austerlitz*, is here also the place of an annihilated time, again closely linked to violence.

In the blind club, which Saleem visits with his son Aadam to see Picture Singh perform in a contest, Saleem learns that identity needs to be closely linked to a context which includes memory and history. It thus represents another example that coincides with Sean P. O'Brien's conclusion that "[i]gnoring the past leaves us barbarians like Shiva or powerless amnesiacs like Picture Singh. Attempts to control narrative representations of time create tyrants like the British Raj and the Widow" (174). An attendant working in the club explains that "here people have no memories families or past; here is for *now*, for nothing except right now" (MC 634, italics in the original). This dark place is perceived by Saleem as "that place outside time, that negation of history" and might be to Aadam what the clock tower was to Saleem (MC 634). Saleem almost suffers from an existential crisis; the club is a place in which he, whose life is so closely bound to the history of India, has no place. His son on the other hand sits here "with ears burning with fascination; his eyes shone in the darkness as he listened, and memorized, and learned...and then there was light" (MC 635). With this reference to *Genesis* and the creation of the earth, the visit to the club is an initiation ritual for Aadam, who will take over from his father. The beam of light in the otherwise dark club reminds the reader of Benjamin's dialectics at a standstill and the *blitzhafte Konstellation*. The insights gained are that of Saleem realising the importance of memory, past and future and

of Aadam's initiation. What he had not yet learnt in the jungle of the Sundarbarns is that "the awareness of oneself as a homogeneous entity in time, a blend of past and present, is the glue of personality", so that consequently through "seceding from history, the Buddha was setting the worst of examples" (MC 490). It is in the blind club then that Saleem tastes the chutney that will lead him to his past, to the pickle factory of Mary Pereira. While Stéphanie Ravillon describes Saleem as "master preserver", who "seems to possess some magical power over time and history" (64), I argue that the chutnification of history has its origin in the blind club and Saleem's new self-awareness as subject of time and history.

In his narration, Saleem does not stick to a chronological way of storytelling; starting with his grandparents, it does not move fast enough for his immediate audience Padma, who, so Saleem complains, is "bullying me back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what-happened-next" (MC 44). Saleem justifies his early beginning as well as deviations and anecdotes by explaining that "[t]hings – even people – have a way of leaking into each other" (MC 44); the past cannot be ignored because it too drips into us. The consequence of Padma's complaints in this instance is a jump forward in the narration. *Midnight's Children* is in its entirety a mostly chronological novel and does not qualify for spiral movements as suggested by Adams or even more strongly by Ravillon.<sup>10</sup> However, there is a lot of prolepsis and cross references so that there certainly is a high degree of deviation from a strictly linear chronology. This narrative style is openly dialectical: "I have become, it seems to me, the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin deities, the wild god of memory and the lotus-goddess of the present ... but must I now become reconciled to the narrow one-dimensionality of a straight line?" (MC 206). The answer is no; for the narrator, linear time is not replaced by another fully developed theory – leading Ravillon to the conclusion that the character's musings on time "bear very little resemblance to the philosophical speculations of an

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<sup>10</sup> In the introduction to *Midnight's Children*, written in 2005, Rushdie reports that an earlier draft version of the novel as it was submitted to the editors was much less chronological. It was feared that it was too difficult for the reader to follow the many temporal shifts so that Rushdie restructured the novel chronologically. Rushdie also reports about a knot in the time-line that was untangled with the help of his editor: "In the submitted manuscript the story jumped from the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 to the end of the Bangladesh war, then circled back to tell the story of Saleem's role in that conflict, caught up with itself at the surrender of the Pakistani army, and then went on" (Introduction to MC xiv). Such loops would have fit in with Adams's temporal spirals in magical realist texts. Although this spiral structure can hardly be found in *Midnight's Children*, these remarks on the changes made show that *Midnight's Children* should not be seen as a counterargument to her observations.

Augustine or of a Bergson” (60) – but transforms “into a speeding, whirligig, blurry fluster of excitement” (MC 16).

It is full of disruptions and mistakes as Saleem himself admits for example regarding Mahatma Gandhi’s death: “Re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date. But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been; in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time” (MC 229–30). He tries to explain this mistake by the confused state he is in since Padma left. Although he notices the mistake, he feels unable to correct it and wonders what the consequences for the entire text might be, if all is invalidated now. But he is too confused to find an answer himself and temporally defers thinking about the matter which eventually means deferring it to the reader. The reader learns about another mistake through Saleem’s conversations with Padma. It concerns the 1957 elections and doubts about their fairness. Padma asks Saleem on which date these elections took place and he promptly answers that they were held in spring. “And then it occurs to me that I have made another error – that the election of 1957 took place before, and not after, my tenth birthday; but although I have racked my brains, my memory refuses, stubbornly, to alter the sequence of events” (MC 308). Although there are plenty of deviations and prolepses, the narration is not entirely flexible in its chronology. O’Brien argues that by “accusing himself of *misdating*, Saleem asserts the objectivity of time while emphasizing that human psychology and the subjective experience of time are often at odds with objective linear sequence” (169, italics in the original). This supports the view that magical realism is not strictly opposed to historical linearity but is able to accommodate several concepts of time. Apart from historical chronology, Saleem might violate a to him correct order of events although he might not be fully aware of it. This is truly Saleem’s story and his chronology, so that the reader is prompted less to doubt his reliability than to recognise the subjective perspective of this and all other accounts, as also Stephen Clingman concludes:

But this is not merely an acknowledgement of the intrinsic unreliabilities of Rushdie’s own memories of India, as he has averred. More than that, we might ask when would be the *right* time for Gandhi to die, in *any* narration? But if synchronicity is the mark of national time, then Rushdie shows that it can, so to speak, take on other dimensions: multiple times resonating at once, not least at the moment of national birth. (114)

The midnight's children, among them also a time traveller, as the most prominent examples of the magical in the magical realist novel are the link between synchronicity and asynchronicity, between the state and the private, between the new India as a modern country orienting towards the West and the old India as the exotic East:

In fact, all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents – the children of midnight were also the children of the time: fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen. Especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream. (MC 159)

How time and the state are linked is best shown by the 30-minute time difference between India and Pakistan after Partition: “time has been an unsteady affair, in my experience, not a thing to be relied upon. It could even be partitioned: the clocks in Pakistan would run half an hour ahead of their Indian counterparts” (MC 102). One of Ahmed’s business partners exclaims shocked “If they can change the time just like that, what’s real any more? I ask you? What’s true?” (MC 103). The narrator Saleem gives a belated answer by wanting to distinguish between truth and reality. Leaving out any definitions for reality, he interestingly associates truth with “something hidden” and “a thing concealed” (MC 103). Further questions he asks himself are “Is this how Mary would have told it? [...] Is this what that fisherman would have said?” (MC 103). On the one hand it is something Saleem cannot possibly know and on the other hand he shows awareness of the multiple truths this ignorance brings with it. Fighting a postcolonial battle, “Saleem puts aporias to work by emphasizing them in his and others’ representations of time as a warning against expressing (oneself) or accepting (from others) the tyrannical certainty that provokes attempts to eliminate competing narratives and narrators”, as O’Brien equally concludes (171). After the previous two subsections dealt with the dialectical nature of magical realism regarding epistemology and ontology as well as the East-West binary, this subsection added an analysis of Western and Indian concepts of time. Temporal confusion has led to broader questions of the definition of truth and is stylistically reflected in the “disorienting shift between diegetic levels”, as Adams has also observed (117). Both topics will be looked at in the following section that demonstrates that reality is a subjective and pluralistic construction based on language.

## SHIFT OF THE DEFINITION OF TRUTH

Magical realism's dialectical nature can be extended to its function and content – an area that Aldea laments is ignored too often by scholarship. As a postmodern and postcolonial mode, magical realism is concerned with ontologies of the margins and the deconstruction of power relationships and hierarchies in the historical context of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Adams also labels it “historiographic metafiction”, in which “the authority of these contexts is both established and undermined” (20–21). It achieves this destabilisation of the subject through an equally destabilising style, as Warnes aptly summarises: “the signifiers, *natural* and *supernatural*, *real* and *fantastic*, depend for their meanings on a stable point of comparison – a shared notion of reality – that is undermined by the relativising effects of magical realism” (7). This destabilisation reveals the world as a construction which relies on linguistic signs that are themselves not fixed:

The very structure of realism means that it is oriented firmly towards the actual. This structure is apparently mirroring a world of fixed territories and a rigid organization. In fact, however, realism is not a representation of an external world so organized, but as an expression of the same organizational principle, a regime of signs. (Aldea 71)

Realism in magical realism thus does not necessarily reflect the extra-textual world but can nevertheless reveal truths about it as it looks at language as the same “organizational principle.” These truths are always multiple ones and perspectivalised, aiming at showing that the here and now consists in fact of constructed realities. Knowledge and identity have consequently become unstable concepts. Creating a Sebaldian vertigo, magical realism appears to serve as a platform for conflict and conflicting contents in the context of Holocaust studies and research into mass atrocities. It highlights the paradoxical nature of trauma by accommodating these destabilising units.

As we have seen, magical realism echoes Sebald's call for acknowledging the subjective approach to the experience of the Second World War and extends it to other contexts that are also connected to mass atrocities and genocide, often as a result of the decolonisation process. These parallels and connections allow us further to explore magical realism as part of this thesis's comparative work on trauma and postmemory texts. As mentioned above, magical realism “constitute[s] another reality beyond western commonsense reality” and D'haen rightly draws our

attention to the fact that the sur-real or magical is not necessarily a veristic image of the East (287). One also has to be careful with assumptions about the reader experience, not least because it might vastly differ depending on the reader's literary and cultural background. Magical realism – as far as the examples I look at are concerned – presents the reader with two worlds that do not depend on the reader's background to be separated. While the reader might develop sympathies for one side more than for the other, she is always able to keep the two worlds apart. If linearity, progress, and consequently realism can be attributed to the West, magical realism challenges the Western truth concept which is singular and objective by involving these into a dialectics with everything that is not linear, singular and objective. If the state seeks order in the historian's coherent narrative, fiction – and in this case magical realism – seeks chaos (Kortenaar 44). The Western worldview is thus shown up as “culturally and historically contingent” and, as Warnes further shows, based “on consensus, founded in language, and driven by discourse about reality rather than reality itself” (13).

Like D'haen, Warnes too looks at Borges in this context. Although Borges himself is not magical realist, we can see how there are common threads that allow us to connect Sebald, Borges, and finally magical realism and Rushdie. Magical realist chaos results in an expanded conception of (Warnes 14) or supplement to (D'haen 290) the real or in doubts as to which of the two worlds is the real or non-real one. D'haen shows how magical realist texts can “by-pass the necessity of legitimating themselves under the center's dispensation of rationality and historical ‘truth’” (290). This can eventually lead to the creation of entirely new realities as we have seen with Borges and as can be understood in the passage quoted earlier from Deleuze and Guattari on becoming-with-the-world. Magical realism reveals reality as a linguistic construct and reinforces this point by creating further realities itself.

In the context of memory and trauma narratives, this focus on subjectivity and multivocality embraces any kind of commemoration. Everyone's stories and narratives are invited and stories are not muted by a master narrative. If memory distorts historical fact, this lies in the nature of memory and trauma; in a magical realist mode of writing, this seemingly distorted perspective finds a platform. It also gives space to the unspeakable and impossible. While not narrating events as they happened, different paths for conveying the impossible can be explored by the

writer without, as Adams nicely shows, being pressured by literary traditions to resolve the aporia.

In an interview Rushdie was asked about the unreliable narrator in *Midnight's Children* and the framework against which this unreliability works. In his reply, Rushdie removes the unreliability from the narrator to the narrative style and multiplicity of voices:

a novel of this length, in first person, can very easily become very, what shall I say, pompous. It can begin to seem like, "Here I am, telling you every thing there is to know. And this is the only book you need to read." And for a country as complex as India, that seemed to me a very false note to strike. And that for any one analysis of events, there is always another one, and another one, and another one. So I wanted to make it clear that Salim's [sic] version is one version, you know, and that it's a version which like any version is occasionally suspect. And I thought that, that would prevent the novel from being read as a kind of attempt to be an oracle. (Rushdie in Kumar, "Doing the Dangerous Thing" 219)

Another apt word to describe this style might be 'oblique' (see for example Clingman 108), which brings us back to Sebald's approach to post-Second World War writing as necessarily oblique. In different ways the two authors, Sebald and Rushdie, follow the same aesthetic agenda. *Midnight's Children* also shies away from creating "'true' national images" because national truth in post-war times is necessarily international and multiple (Aldea 62).

Truth assurance formulae such as 'to tell the truth' or 'the truth was' are plenty in *Midnight's Children*. On the one hand they serve the purpose of assuring the reader that the novel's magical elements are real as well. Especially through sceptical interjections by his audience Padma, the narrator Saleem recognises the necessity for these truth-assuring phrases, as is for example the case in the story about the magician's ghetto:

The plain, unadorned truth is that, in those days, the ghetto illusionists and other artistes began to hit new peaks of achievement – jugglers managed to keep one thousand and one balls in the air at a time, and a fakir's as-yet-untrained protégée strayed on to a bed of hot coals, only to stroll across it unconcerned, as though she had acquired her mentor's gifts by osmosis; [...]. (MC 540–41)

Saleem wants the reader to believe that his experiences in the ghetto are a, and also part of *the*, reality. Here the magical sphere is in a separated location, which is not

usually the case for magical elements in the novel. It shows how the two worlds co-exist without raising the need for a decision in favour of one or the other: one world does not explain the other away. The insistence on such phrases, however, can also have the opposite effect: it might raise suspicion with the reader as to why these phrases are necessary so that the narrator's reliability might be put into question.

The second observation through the truth formulae allows the reader to trace a development in the narrator's attitude from a singular truth concept to one which is defined by truth's multiplicity. With his early magical ability of telepathy, Saleem develops the feeling of

somehow creating a world; [...] which is to say, I had entered into the illusion of the artist, and thought of the multitudinous realities of the land as the raw unshaped material of my gift. 'I can find out any damn thing!' I triumphed, 'There isn't a thing I cannot know!'" (MC 241).

His ability initially gives him the feeling of ultimate power, which is also reflected in his early ambition of telling the singular truth. Recounting how he became aware of the other midnight's children, he attacks harshly the sceptical reader: "To anyone whose personal cast of mind is too inflexible to accept these facts, I have this to say: That's how it was; there can be no retreat from the truth" (MC 273). At this stage, the narrator Saleem does not (yet) acknowledge the subjectivity and multiplicity of the notion of truth and puts his own version over the versions of others. Although he acknowledges that memory has its own special truth as it "selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies", he nevertheless believes at this stage in a singular truth based on his own memory: "but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own" (MC 292). Such limited views on truth and its multitude are explained in the novel by people's obsessions with correspondences: "It is a sort of national longing for form – or perhaps simply an expression of our deep belief that forms lie hidden within reality; that meaning reveals itself only in flashes. Hence our vulnerability to omens ..." (MC 417). Again there is the flash of what might be Benjamin's constellation; both express a longing for meaning to be found in patterns and formal structures, two of which are myth and the state.

However, this attitude towards truth in his narration starts to shift with Saleem's ability of "sniffing-out-the-truth" (MC 427). When Saleem confesses his



love to his sister Jamila, explaining that technically they are not even brother and sister, “he could hear his words sounding hollow, and realized that although what he was saying was the literal truth, there were other truths which had become more important because they had been sanctified by time” (MC 451). This is another example of the close relationship between time and the multitude of truths. Discovering these “other truths” is now becoming a major part of his writing project and Saleem realises that memory does not promote a singular truth but many different voices’ truths. He develops a more critical point of view with regard to the state, which tries to mute these voices:

and that, in a country where the truth is what it is instructed to be, reality quite literally ceases to exist, so that everything becomes possible except what we are told is the case; and maybe this was the difference between my Indian childhood and Pakistani adolescence – that in the first I was beset by an infinity of alternative realities, while in the second I was adrift, disorientated, amid an equally infinite number of falsenesses, unrealities and lies. (MC 453)

This harsh verdict follows unfair elections. The singular truth has now been transferred to the state and has become an expression of oppressive power, something Rushdie also discovered in the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez: “In Márquez’s experience, truth has been controlled to the point at which it has ceased to be possible to find out what it is. The only truth is that you are being lied to all the time” (“Márquez” 301) – a truth stylistically presented in “interminable sentences” and a “non-linear form providing an exact analogy for the feeling of endless stasis” (303). While earlier Saleem did not explain the reality side of the truth-reality distinction, he now shows how they nevertheless belong together. Saleem now acknowledges and even favours the multitude of possible truths, which comes along with an “infinity of alternative realities.” According to the narrator, reality cannot work on the basis of falseness. It is here represented by the Pakistani state, but the same is equally true for India’s Emergency laws and the time under Indira Gandhi’s rule. Comparing the different truths of the Emergency to Indira Gandhi’s coiffure, Saleem finds striking similarities: “the Emergency, too, had a white part—public, visible, documented, a matter for historians—and a black part which, being secret macabre untold, must be a matter for us” (MC 588). Saleem’s thoughts on memory and truth become more refined so that he can now link the public and visible, i.e. the state’s version of the truth, to the historian. The

remaining secrets are a matter for the writer, but also for ordinary people more generally. Admitting that he lied about Shiva's death in an earlier instance, the narrator wonders whether there are limits to the writer or whether it is indeed possible to change the past and create new truths and realities "simply by saying they occurred" (MC 619). This is very much a Borgesian agenda.

The final chapter of Book Two, "How Saleem achieved purity", features the highest degree of doubt about reality, in this case about a scene of violence between Pakistani and Indian forces, during which a lot of Saleem's family dies. The several pages long passage is marked by the lead question of "But who attacked? Who defended?" (MC 471). The narrator gives information that seems partly quoted from news reports through the short style and use of quotation marks. This information presented as fact is then doubted: "When, on September 1<sup>st</sup>, our ten-times-better soldiers crossed the line at Chhamb, were they aggressors or were they not?" (MC 471). Stressing the degree to which the Indian soldiers outnumbered the Pakistani side, the reasonableness of the means to defend themselves is put into question. "Nothing was real; nothing certain" so that questions dominate the page: "But did it or didn't it? Was that how it happened?" – "But did he or didn't he?" – "Nationalism or meanness?" – "Who to believe?" – "Did they didn't they?" – "or was it all some kind of astonishing illusion?" – "Could even a death be said to be the case?" (MC 473). As part of the armed conflict, there were air-raids on 22 September all over Pakistan and in the resulting destruction Saleem's family finds its death: "Aircraft, real or fictional, dropped actual or mythical bombs. It is, accordingly, either a matter of fact or a figment of a diseased imagination that [... through] the only three bombs to hit Rawalpindi" his relatives find their death. The chapter conveys a sense of helplessness in the face of absurd violence. It makes victims and survivors question what they thought they knew and the basis of how knowledge had previously been acquired. Reality is then put into question, so that eventually it does not make a difference to the narrator Saleem if the bombs were real or mythical, knowing about the power of words and myth for the state and state violence. It also leads us back to the characterisation of magical realism as primarily dialectical: "Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems – but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible" (MC 229). Rushdie brings various aspects together that are important for magical realism but also for memory and

trauma texts. It puts the subject in a relation with history, highlighting the importance of memory. One can look at the same historical event from a seemingly plausible or sur-realistic point of view. Reality is thus not formed by the event itself but by someone's perspective on it: "the illusion itself *is* reality" (MC 229, italics in the original).

“[E]VERYDAY A DOZEN NEW STORIES”: GOSSIP AS A STYLE OF MEMORY

An important element of Rushdie's novel that showcases the multiple perspectives and narratives is its multivocality. This takes literal shape in the voices of the midnight's children and of course in the different voices and perspectives of the narrator himself, which also leads to the blurring of narratives levels. After examining these narrative levels and related to that the use of personal pronouns, this subsection will show how further voices are introduced through the narrative technique of "gossipifying history" (Bhaya Nair 64). These strategies with their multitude of voices all (re)present the shifting definition of truth towards the plural, subjective, and even magical.

Sasser looks at magical realism in postmemorial Holocaust literature and concludes that "the voice of the other (represented by the magical code) is inserted into the dominant framework (the real), resulting in a uniquely polyvocal narrative" (16). While this observation is true for a multitude of these texts, it should be stressed that the allocation of the other as belonging to the magical code and realism as the dominant frame is arbitrary: Hegerfeldt asks as well "with what justification the Western world-view should be the norm against which everything else is measured" (52). In magical realism, one of the worldviews is not embedded in the other one so that it is difficult to speak of a dominating frame. Recycling the vocabulary and concepts that postcolonial discourse tries to combat runs the risk of undermining magical realism's postcolonial project of deconstructing epistemological hierarchies.

With reference to Adams's work, Sasser further states that these texts are "both enacting and enabling polyphony and alterity" (16), meaning that in a manner similar to Sebald's works, the text reaches out to the readers and invites their active participation to evaluate the voice(s) heard. Saleem the child has the ability of telepathy and the voices he hears are "as profane, and as multitudinous, as dust" (MC 232) and he soon learns to distinguish between what he calls the "real outside-

voice” and the “inside voice” (MC 236). He discovers the multifaceted lives of tourists, celebrities, and politicians and is almost annihilated by the voices’ massed identities (MC 242), reminding us of postmemory and the overpowering memories of the parent generation. When on his tenth birthday Saleem finds out about the remaining 581 midnight’s children, he is able to look at them as individuals through their unique magical abilities. Even though he claims that he is “refusing to distinguish the voices from one another” as this would exceed the work load he can cope with and because they have become a “many-headed monster” in his mind (MC 317), he already shows through the examples he gives of the children and their conversations that he does distinguish them. The narrator lists individual abilities and renders the discussions at the Conference as fragmented and incoherent as they are.

In order to make his reader believe the story about the 1001 children, he uses realistic modes to affirm the magical by referring to newspaper reports about “magic children and assorted freaks” (MC 273). In the novel, the magical also has the purpose of “distinguish[ing] the protagonists from millions of others whose stories they represent” (Bhaya Nair 58). The reader is thus aware that the voices and stories are not placeholders but distinct narratives as the narrator explicitly asks “Is this how Mary would have told it? [...] Is this what that fisherman would have said?” (MC 103). This is also emphasised in a passage about the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965:

The war in the Rann lasted until July 1st. That much is fact; but everything else lies concealed beneath the doubly hazy air of unreality and make-believe which affected all goings-on in those days, and especially all events in the phantasmagoric Rann ... so that the story I am going to tell, which is substantially that told by my cousin Zafar, is as likely to be true as anything; as anything, that is to say, except what we were officially told. (MC 465)

The only fact that the narrator accepts is the time span during which the war took place. “Unreality” and “make-believe” are not part of the magical world in this case, but relate to the state and its propaganda – to “what we were officially told.” This is thus also an example of magical realism which reveals the ordinary as so hard to believe that it resembles more the magical. The Rann of Kutch is also a real setting but equally turned magical. The narrator Saleem makes it clear that what follows is a story he heard before from Zafar. Naming a source has a long tradition of

providing a narration with reliability. When Saleem says that the story “is as likely to be true as anything”, he means this literally: all stories are true as they all offer a different perspective on an event. It is less the ‘Who?, what?, or when?’ which provides authenticity but rather someone’s engagement and perspective on the event. The ex-centric is favoured over the centre’s voice.

The polyvocal is also closely linked to the fragment – the fragment of a whole that can never be reached. This is an idea that Rushdie consciously chose for his writing as he describes in “Imaginary Homelands”: “it was precisely the partial nature of these memories, their fragmentation, that made them so evocative for me. The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were *remains*” (12, italics in the original). The fragment as the individual and distinct voice contests the mainstreaming of existing modes and discourses; a conclusion that Adams also draws for magical realism and Holocaust discourse (14). Focusing on the multitude and individuality of the ex-centric voice is a way of contesting the state’s and history’s singularity and universal claim.

This multitude of voices also results in narrative layering, so that for shorter, embedded stories, the narrator shifts or changes entirely. This narrative layering can create a simultaneity that was also tested by Borges in “El Aleph” (Sieber 204). What could be distinguished through the use of reported speech markers in Sebald’s works is blurred in Rushdie’s novel, and there are moments of transitions between sections when the reader does not and cannot know in which narrative situation she finds herself. The topic of the self-image is first explicitly addressed by Saleem with regard to the midnight’s children but can then be applied to the blurring of the narrator and the narrative situation. Realising that the picture he had of himself was distorted, he “encouraged the membership of the Conference, one by one, to go and look into a mirror, or a patch of still water; and then we did manage to find out what we really looked like” (MC 304). It needed a bit of distance and a new perspective that complemented the self-perception in order to be able to work together on a social level. This episode also helps the reader to remember that the whole novel, too, is perspectivised. This introduces a play with personal pronouns throughout the novel. Like the markers for reported speech in *Austerlitz*, these pronouns are traces in the text. The reader, however, struggles to identify who left these traces behind and to whom they lead. What for Sebald helps to separate narrative levels is in Rushdie’s work a deliberate obscuring.

There are some unsmooth transitions between narrative layers that are marked by a play with the personal pronouns “I” and “he” – both sometimes refer to Saleem the narrator or Saleem the experiencing character in the embedded story: “He and I, I and he...I no longer have his gift; he never had mine. There are times when he seems a stranger, almost...” (MC 230). Feeling estranged one moment, narrator and experiencer sometimes merge: “Different and similar, we are joined by heat. A shimmering heat-haze, then and now, blurs his then-time into mine...my confusion, travelling across the heat-waves, is also his” (MC 231). Also when Padma tries to engage with Saleem’s narration, saying that she is happy he ran away into the Sundarbans, Saleem insists “not I. He. He, the buddha”, adding another identity to his list (MC 502). What Ricœur describes as tension between – in this case still clearly distinguishable – hero and narrator in Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, is brought to extremes here. Proust’s narrator “is caught up in a sort of overlapping of time spans by incorporating the reminiscences of the hero in the course of a search that moves forward, giving the narrative the form of a ‘future in the past’” (*Time III* 134). Although there are disruptive flashbacks and overlaps, identities are restricted to their temporal spheres in Proust’s work. In *Midnight’s Children*, such a focus has been given up for Saleem’s crisis of identity, split between narrator and hero at different stages and transgressing their temporal places.

Particularly disorienting is a section in the jungle: Saleem has been bitten by a snake and miraculously survives the attack. He also regains his lost memory and after having recovered, he tells his life story to his fellow soldiers:

His eyes were closed. After this, the boy soldiers waited for the man-dog to die; but I was stronger than the snake-poison. For two days he became as rigid as a tree, and his eyes crossed, so that he saw the world in mirror-image, with the right side on the left; at last he relaxed, and the look of milky abstraction was no longer in his eyes. I was rejoined to the past, jolted into unity by snake-poison, and it began to pour out through the buddha’s lips. As his eyes returned to normal, his words flowed so freely that they seemed to be an aspect of the monsoon. The child-soldiers listened, spellbound, to the stories issuing from his mouth, [...]. (MC 508–09)

The personal pronouns shift back and forth between the first and third person singular. Trying to identify one as storyteller and one as experiencer does not resolve this confusion. The complexity of a multitude of voices and identities can even be found within one individual; in the case of Saleem, this results in the telling

of “all lost histories” (MC 509). He also needs an audience to convey his memories orally as a personal and more engaging form of memory. “[T]o understand me, you’ll have to swallow a world”, Saleem says (MC 535), and with the magical realist novel Rushdie is able to deliver this world with all its complexities and absurdities. In the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, Ricœur insists that “the passage from configuration to refiguration require[s] the confrontation between two worlds, the fictive world of the text and the real world of the reader” (159). Although we have seen above through Borges that the world of the reader cannot be easily identified as realistic and not necessarily as the one opposed to the magical realm, the general idea of opposed worlds in connection with the unreliable narrator leads Ricœur rightly to the conclusion that these texts invite and depend on the participation of the reader (163). If the novel is successful in activating the reader, “the stasis of disorientation” can generate “a dynamics of reorientation” (170). Through the phrases to indicate reported speech, Sebald does not allow for the same degree of disorientation; the phrases guide the reader towards the internal mirror and thus around the corner of the Sebald’s stylistic periscope. In *Midnight’s Children*, the function of the deceiving narrative layering is that of “stereoscopic vision” (Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands” 19). Rushdie uses this concept in the context of the expatriate writer and his or her double position as both plural and partial, which also allows the reader to see the two-dimensional object in 3D in order to recognise a complexity that could not have been seen otherwise.

As has been shown, Sebald’s reported speech markers keep order in the narrative. Beyond narrative levels they also order speech itself in an almost scientific or documentary way whenever Austerlitz’s monologue is disrupted. While this also leaves space for a multitude of different voices and narratives through creating access points for other characters and the reader, Rushdie chose a style that not only mediates but also represents the polyvocality, orality, and fragmentariness that are so important for memory in a more unordered, less scientific way. If the document and scientific research dominate Austerlitz’s sophisticated, monological style, gossip as the every-day chit chat in *Midnight’s Children* represents an inclusive style in the chaotic India after Partition beyond borders of class, religion, or gender. Rukmini Bhaya Nair explains that this style of gossip as developed by Rushdie “provides the ideal mode of discourse, it allows narration in ‘scraps, shreds, fragments’” (57) and stresses its aptness to do so due

to “the lapses of real people” that gossip tries to absorb and convey (53), which includes gaps and mistakes and is even more powerful against a real historical background. Bhaya Nair lists examples from *Midnight's Children* of the urine drinking Moraji Desai, Mountbatten's wife eating chicken breast; and Jinnah's condescending attitude towards horoscopes to show how gossip in the form of these details “promote[s] a less reverential attitude towards such public people. In effect, they perform the speech act of public insult” (59). Nandini Bhattacharya identifies parallels to Bakhtin's ‘carnavalesque’ and argues that Rushdie's carnival language is a “liberation from official, hierarchical seriousness, from absolutized structures of any kind” (71). Rushdie had to justify sections that can be read as criticism of Indira Gandhi to his lawyers before the publication of the novel and successfully argued that he “was clearly characterizing the information as gossip” (Introduction to MC xvi). Gossip, so Bhaya Nair, is not a literary style and usually more associated with women, but more than that it is a form of resistance to the official record of “men's histories” (61), linking the mundane every-day conversation with the bigger political picture. This is also the case when the young Saleem moves into other people's minds and *Filmfare* gossip about famous dancers leads him to playback singers, clowns and eventually politics (MC 240). Evie Burns, Saleem's childhood crush, is seen gossiping with a lot of people, especially adults; here topics move from the application of make-up to guns, foreshadowing tragic developments (MC 253). The washerwoman Durga is another gossiping character in the novel. First she is ridiculed until she prophesies Saleem's death and cracking up (MC 623), revealing a dark and morbid side to the importance of gossip by saying that “when a man loses interest in new matters, he is opening the door for the Black Angel” (MC 624).

The second major issue to consider about gossip in *Midnight's Children* is centred around the implicit trust between the speaker and listener or narrator and the reader: “gossip invokes ideas of morality shared between the narrator and hearers” and “may be held to perform a therapeutic function” (Bhaya Nair 53; 54), leading us back to earlier thoughts on the talking but also listening cure. To a certain degree it can also make up for the deceptive nature of the blurred narrative layers. Gossip's nature as oral, as a spoken way of communication and transmission of memory as well as of moral conventions, must be highlighted, a nature which Bhaya Nair traces in the punctuation in Rushdie's novel:



The plethora of punctuation to be observed in *Midnight's Children* is undoubtedly an attempt to represent certain aspects of speech in written form. [...] Dots, dashes, hyphens, colons, brackets, question marks, exclamations, capitals, italics, all reinforce in graphemic form that impression of fragmentation we had earlier, of quick changes of scene and thought, of the spoken voice characteristically stressing important phrases, pausing, reformulating expressions. (64)

She summarises some of the main observations of this oral mode in certain compound constructions, the number of onomatopoeic expressions, misspellings in favour of conversational rhythms as well as phrases that run together (65). This “undervalued form of everyday talk” is reempowered to subvert the grand narratives through the creation of doubt about what was thought to be fact (Bhaya Nair 52–53). It puts the ordinary and the mundane, one of the elements in the form of writing as demanded by Rushdie, into the spotlight and revalues them as it is not subject to censorship and open for the majority of topics including those that are muted in official discourse. If the Western way of thinking is characterised by the document, magical realism can work effectively through gossip which, following Bhaya Nair, seems to invite its participants to “mention the unmentionable so as to recall unspoken but shared moral assumptions” (62). This unmentionable then can be the magical or fantastic element: on the one hand it serves as a counterargument to Western progressive attitudes and on the other hand Rushdie “deployed fantasy in order to be faithful to the reality of India, where millions believe in the world of the spirits” (Kortenaar 44). Although Rushdie does not elaborate in depth on oral and spiritual elements in his novel, they nevertheless lend themselves as a platform for trauma and memory narratives. Again narrative levels blur and protagonists, narrators and readers can exchange roles: “The reader eavesdrops on the author’s gossip, the author on the narrator, the narrator on the protagonists, the protagonists often on each other” (Bhaya Nair 57). They are all characterised by partial and peripheral views that interconnect. We can find a similar oblique, interlocked narrative style with shifting focalisation with Rushdie as we do with Sebald. Here, however, the recreation of truth is not centred around the document but around gossip and the magical.

#### METAPHORS

As has been outlined above – especially through the intertextual integration of Borges’s fiction in the case of Sebald and the epistemology and ontology of magical

realism – both trauma studies and the magical realist mode describe a struggle that is fundamentally linguistic. The ‘regime of signs’ is on the one hand that which constitutes the reality which magical realism tries to deconstruct and on the other hand the only available tool to achieve this goal, the deconstruction of itself. Warnes further highlights “the metafictional foregrounding of the constitutive, performative aspect of language” in magical realism as a successful component for defamiliarisation which aims at “disqualify[ing] the basis on which such representation depends” rather than supporting a particular world view (16). The experience of language as arbitrary does not always have to lead to a language crisis; mostly this arbitrariness does not cause problems in everyday communication. However, the traumatised victim experiences this crisis on an existential level as he or she lacks a shared linguistic code with the listener to make herself understood.

*Midnight’s Children* offers two strategies to solve this impasse. Upon hearing the many voices, young Saleem cannot understand the different languages – “The voices babbled in everything from Malayalam to Naga dialects, from the purity of Lucknow Urdu to the Southern slurrings of Tamil. I understood only a fraction of the things being said within the walls of my skull” (MC 232–33) – until he goes beyond language to “universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcended words” (MC 233), promoting the idea that there is a way of understanding that is non-linguistic. Gillian Gane raises considerable doubts about the possibility of this thought-form. She argues that there are references that suggest that this thought-form relies on language. Ears and tongue, for example, are mentioned in the novel, although neither of these would be necessary for this kind of non-linguistic communication. She further wonders how hesitation phenomena such as “you know” or puns would be given if it was not for a thought transmission that relies on a linguistic code which is most likely the English language (591). These reflections presuppose, however, that the text’s reality reflects the reader’s, and thus Gane’s, extra-textual reality which, as has been shown, does not necessarily have to be the case. Explaining it away as a strategy for marketability (Gane 594) robs the magical realist text of one of its magical elements and turns it into a text of the fantastic. An important question is also where this supposed turn towards the linguistic code happens: are the children really speaking English or do Gane’s observations merely reflect the problem of conveying a non-linguistic idea through (the English)

language? Saleem's "more-than-telepathy" (MC 233) shows how the magical can be a way of circumventing or at least addressing the language problem and allows the writer to explore further possibilities of representation.

The second strategy is metaphorical language – for Rushdie an important stylistic tool: "metamorphosis becomes a figure of metaphor itself, showing how meanings are carried over from text to text, from language to the world and to the body, and back again" (Warnes 15). The metaphor illustrates language's arbitrariness, but is also a tested device for when other linguistic codes fail due to its self-awareness as standing for something else. Warnes further explains that

the supernatural event or presence may stand synecdochically or metonymically for an alternative way of conceiving of reality [... and that it] stands in place of an idea or a set of ideas, say, about the ways language constructs reality, or about the incapacities of binaristic thinking. (14–15)

Before this allegorical function, the metaphor in magical realism almost literally serves as a bridge between the magical world and the realistic world. Most metaphors in *Midnight's Children* – but also in many other magical realist texts – are literalised, revealing Ricœur's claim that "meaning of a metaphorical statement rises up from the blockage of any literal interpretation" as short sighted (*Metaphor* 271). What Ricœur further describes as a tension and separation between literal and metaphorical interpretation becomes a hazy, dialectical interplay. This can be observed in Rushdie's novel for example when Nadir Khan is swept under the carpet (MC 66) or when Ahmed Sinai cries out "The bastards have shoved my balls in an ice-bucket!" metaphorically referring to his assets but on a literal level also to his testicles as his wife has to find out when trying to comfort him in the bedroom: "So cold, Allah, so coooold, like little round cubes of ice!" (MC 185; 186). Hegerfeldt shows how in *Midnight's Children* "literalization is not restricted to figurative language: thoughts and concepts are endowed with physical existence as well." She suggests that literalisation also accounts for the magical in these texts "for many of the apparently fantastic events are based on a making-real of figures of speech, mental concepts, or psychological mechanisms" (56). The most important examples are Saleem becoming a radio by hearing the many voices representing the multiplicity of the South Asian subcontinent as well as his cracking up as a literalised metaphor of the divided state and, as Jill Didur points out for Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India* but with equal relevance for *Midnight's*

*Children*, “the fragmented, nonlinear, and contradictory experience of ‘independence’” (69). The many voices in Saleem’s mind stand for the multitude of individual stories surrounding the partition of India – either, as Saleem himself suggests, for “the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation” or “the true hope for freedom”: “Midnight’s children can be made to represent many things, according to your point of view” (MC 278).

Not leaving a lot of space for deductions and analysis to the reader, Rushdie demonstrates through the narrator Saleem that the metaphor contributes to a dialectical style, moving between the poles of intended and perceived as well as metaphorical and literal meaning. What is here labelled literal is explored by Fenwick as metonymical. He analyses metaphors and metonymies in *Midnight’s Children* through Ricoeur’s *The Rule of Metaphor* to refute claims that postcolonial literature favours metonymy over metaphor. Fenwick also shows how metaphor depends on its dialectical nature:

According to Ricoeur, metaphor not only combines similarity and difference, but is, at heart, motivated by their interaction: the “is” of similarity entailed by the semantic order of language, and the “is not” of difference entailed by the semiotic, together generate metaphorical meaning. To privilege either one of these orders at the expense of the other would be to deny the dual character of the metaphorical statement. (59)

As Hegerfeldt also observes, “the text is suspended halfway between the literal and the figurative, paradoxically encouraging a metaphorical and a literal reading at once” (236). However, the label of “bifurcation so typical of magic realist fiction” (Hegerfeldt 236) implies a dividedness that I would like to counter by highlighting the space of possibilities this dialectical nature of magical realism creates: it opens up opportunities to connect and bring one’s own position into the reading process. It can do so because metaphor is dialectical; through “the paradox of the copula, where being-as signifies being and not being” (Ricoeur, *Metaphor* 370), it offers space for the aporetic: “The ‘truths’ expressed by metaphor are [...] always unresolved and unresolvable” (Fenwick 59). Rushdie himself highlights the connective power of the metaphorical expression through Saleem who says about his amnesiac time that “even in those depths of my withdrawal from responsibility, I remained responsible, though the workings of the metaphorical modes of connection” (MC 490).

Metaphors are a crucial component of these creations of reality as also the narrator stresses: “Reality can have metaphorical content; that does not make it less real” (MC 278). Ricœur’s example of a painting that evokes sadness points into the same direction:

The expression (sad), therefore, is no less real than the colour (blue). The fact that it is neither verbal nor literal, but representational and transferred, does not make the expression any less “true,” so long as it is appropriate. Expression is not constituted by the effects on the spectator, for I can perceive the sadness of a picture without being made sad by it. “Metaphorical importation” is able to make this predicate an acquired property; the expression is truly the possession of the thing. (*Metaphor* 281)

Accordingly Saleem’s own relationship to the state, for example, is at the same time literal and metaphorical, and in both manifestations real (MC 330–32). Hegerfeldt ascribes the fact that the doctor is not able to diagnose Saleem’s condition to him being a “representative of Western science” and to his inability to “see that Saleem’s claim might be true in another sense” (241). After independence, Indian businessmen turn white – literally, which is described as a “pigmentation disorder” (MC 248) – and figuratively to show “how Westernization is a decidedly real aspect of post-Independence Indian society” (Hegerfeldt 240). Hegerfeldt concludes that “[t]hrough techniques of literalization, magic realist fiction puts the immaterial on a par with empirical reality: endowed with material existence, metaphors and memories, concepts and emotions are shown to be as important as the material world” (236), echoing Durix, who also argues that “magic powers can create reality, signifiers can trigger off the appearance of what they refer to” (61). These strategies show how reality is constructed and that this constructedness is not limited to the empirical and literal. Descriptions of metaphor as arbitrary and defamiliarising but also as a tested device and bridge show that metaphor, too, is inherently dialectical, so that its suitability for magical realism and the mediation of something that resists mediation lies at hand. It also constitutes the stylistic realisation of Borges’s and magical realism’s ambition to fight tradition and rationalism with its own weapons.

While these two worlds of the magical and realistic are clearly separate and the use of metaphor does not lead to an intersection, it can nevertheless function in both worlds, even if that means that in one world metaphor is literalised as we can see in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. Metaphor can thus move between the two worlds;

the importance of the theme of movement has already been addressed in the second chapter. Clingman stresses that concerning “language, fiction, identity, or location, navigation does not mean crossing or having crossed, but *being in the space of crossing*” (24–25, italics in the original). Through this use of metaphors, magical realism attempts to answer the silences of a lot of trauma and memory fiction. By opening up this navigational space, it resists fixation and offers access points to a wider readership. The multitude of truths that can be discovered by engaging with the texts is itself an act of creation.

### Conclusion

Looking at *Midnight's Children* allows us to move beyond the Western and European frame. The novel is exclusively set in the subcontinent, but although this could not have been discussed in more detail in this thesis, Rushdie occasionally contextualises the Second World War within *Midnight's Children* and also presents the wider implications of Indian history, showing how in the twentieth century national histories have become global. The magical realist style has been defined as dialectical with regard to the magical and realistic worldviews and its attitude to Western traditions such as linear temporality. The novel shows how truth and reality are concepts shaped by their multitude and subjectivity, which, in the context of trauma texts, reject the historian's singular truth in favour of the perspectivalised narration, even if it might be distorted by flawed memories. That this can be a fruitful approach to the past has already been shown in the previous analysis of Sebald's *Austerlitz* as exemplified by the protagonist's reading of H.G. Adler's book on Terezín and his viewing of the Terezín film. Memory goes beyond history textbooks or an eyewitness's memory by including the reader as an active part in the narration. Metaphors play an important role as they open up spaces of possibility which can be linked to the notion of movement as elaborated in the first chapter. Looking at Sebald's texts through a Borgesian lens and complementing this with observations about *Midnight's Children*, we have seen how although language is perceived as inadequate in both a post-Second World War and a postcolonial text, it is nevertheless in both cases a world-creating power that prompts the reader to question existing ontologies.

## Conclusion

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This thesis has brought together modes of thinking and writing from after the Second World War and the partition of India. Trauma and memory studies, which have been criticised for their Eurocentric scope, are not owned by (post-)Second World War discourse and literature; they can fruitfully be applied to other traumatic pasts as well, which can go as far as explicitly integrating references to the Second World War in a postcolonial novel, for example. The Holocaust can no longer be understood as a singular and singled out event because of its global consequences which are felt even today. Trauma theory is equally experiencing a cultural turn and presents itself as a more open and dynamic concept than before; the postcolonial perspective on trauma as well as the perspective on postcolonialism through trauma greatly contribute to this turn. To reflect this open and inclusive theory of trauma, I have used Edkins's definition, according to which those who stand for protection and safety turn against those whom they had promised to protect. The shattering of this fundamental trust plays an important role in defining trauma, which is not to be understood through a high level of violence alone. Memory can be understood as both a symptom of a traumatic experience and part of its recovery process, although there is disagreement about whether there can ever be a full recovery from trauma. If trauma is shaped by temporal and spatial distance, the postcolonial subject must not be excluded. As a theory that was founded on notions of what is fundamentally different and the subversion of the same, postcolonialism can offer new opportunities for the representation of the aporia of trauma.

For this purpose, the first chapter addressed distance on the one hand from the temporal point of view and on the other hand from a spatial perspective. The temporal point of view is characterised by a discussion about the different generations' attitude towards the traumatic past and the generation of survivors, perpetrators, and witnesses. This discussion is predominant in Second World War research and has been explored with regard to the variety of literatures each generation produces. Most notable is the shift from the third to the fourth generation, the latter one without direct access to eyewitnesses and survivors other than through an archive. Similar issues are equally relevant for the partition of India but have not been investigated in equal depth. Spatial distance has been looked at

through Rushdie's essay "Imaginary Homelands", according to which the expatriate writer is both the link between different cultures but also the outsider – a scenario which was experienced by Thomas Mann and Edward W. Said, to give an example from the Second World War context and postcolonialism, respectively. Similar challenges had to be tackled by the protagonist of Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. The unspeakable, distanced past of Tridib's death as a consequence of post-Partition riots is only slowly uncovered by the narrator. Similar to Rushdie's literalisation of metaphors, the former family home is actually partitioned and results in a first example of the absurd and random notion of borders. The novel peaks in a scene of the narrator hunched over a map, realising that history and violence are not stopped by borders or distance. But he has been equipped with a coping strategy by his mentor: that of imagining places. Ghosh thus by extension also makes a powerful statement on the power of fiction.

After it was shown how distance is a shared concern of both Second World War and Partition writing, chapter two examined the inclusion of postcolonial topics in a post-Second World War novel, while chapter three offered an intertextual reading of a postcolonial novel and a Second World War intertext. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, as explored in chapter two, refers to Belgian colonialism several times, but also addresses wider postcolonial issues about oppression and power. This is also taken up again in his treatment of the topic of time: being an oppressive force itself, it is linked to colonialism and the National Socialist past. Sebald also tries to subvert power structures stylistically through the number of narrative levels and inclusion of the reader. A non-linear understanding of time is dealt with by Sebald already, but it can also be encountered in Desai's novel through her choice of epigraph by Eliot. Chapter three therefore offered a reading of *Baumgartner's Bombay* through Eliot's "East Coker" and showed how again distance, especially spatial distance, plays a major role in this fictional memory project. What holds true for Ghosh's narrator can only be repeated in the case of Hugo: history is not stopped by borders or distance. While Hugo himself feels as if he is chased by the past, the reader eventually wonders whether it has not always already been there anyway. In the human condition of suffering Desai breaks free from her intertext and rejects any notions of hope.

Chapter four shows how seemingly different styles, each attributed to either post-Second World War literature or postcolonialism respectively, pursue a shared



aim, namely that of disclosing all truths as subjective, constructed, and multiple which enables new modes of ontological thinking. 'Imagining places', as in Ghosh's novel, is taken to extremes here but seems a promising venture considering that trauma resists expression through established modes. These conclusions are again reached through an analysis of the understanding of time in Sebald's works and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. In this regard, Borges and his "Refutation of Time" have proven to be a valuable bridge between the two. How this alternative thinking on time is connected to the distortion of reality is then shown through the example of Austerlitz's research about Terezi. If it ultimately also challenges the binaristic thinking of memory and history, Rushdie's magical realism follows the same agenda. The mode of writing itself is shaped by dialectical features which go beyond a mere binary: it does not have to be either magical or realistic. This dialectic is also extended to Eastern and Western concepts of time: the disruption of linearity as observed in the insecurities of Saleem as the narrator leads to more fundamental epistemological and ontological questions. These are reflected in the style of gossip: its unordered and inclusive nature mirrors the polyvocality of memory and gives the reader the possibility of eavesdropping. In response to the crisis of language in the aftermath of trauma, Rushdie's use of metaphors is a major tool for creating realities, as it stands between the world of the magical and the realistic. Sebald and Rushdie thus also address a linguistic distance. This distance, however, has immediately been subverted by their modes of writing, which have the aim of pushing the boundaries of ontological explorations in fiction in the aftermath of historical and collective trauma.

The study of Sebald's *Austerlitz*, as an example of post-Second World War writing, as well as Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay*, and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, as Partition novels, can serve as the beginning of an investigation towards the accessibility, integration, and solidarity of traumatic pasts in different cultures, an investigation which invites many more comparisons and transcultural readings. The intersection of trauma theory, memory studies, and postcolonialism in addition to the selection criterion of the expatriate writer showed that each area could contribute to the understanding of another one. The theories involved did not have to be discarded for such an ambition, instead they underwent an overdue transformation. The reader of the text has been foregrounded together with those who want to participate in the memory of the past as an active, dynamic,

and contemporary process. Along these lines, acts of remembering have been described as resistance against the streamlining through the official and national version of history. It has to be noted, however, that this process is one that is delayed and slowed down for the countries affected by Partition compared to post-Second World War memory. Looking at Jammu and Kashmir, Partition has not yet reached an end point and “the wounds are [...] constantly created anew” (Greenberg 93). Fictional texts have in this regard confirmed what historiography has already observed for its own discipline: the state distorts or selects narratives with the aim “of disseminating a nationalist-infused narrative marginalizing partition’s suffering while emphasizing the immense achievement of India’s state-building process” (Greenberg 95). Early Partition novels also depict the pre-Partition world as one “that has just slipped out of reach and left us blinking in the harsh daylight of a postcolonial modernity”, showing how “[t]he reality of the estranged homeland became a cipher for a melancholic modernity” (Kabir 123; 124). A revisionist history, “expos[ing] the hypocrisy, weakness, and corruption of the first generation’s national heroes and identif[ying] how each ‘founding father’ had betrayed the proclaimed values and principles to which he ostensibly had been dedicated” (Greenberg 109), only emerged in the 1980s (101). With Desai’s, Ghosh’s, and Rushdie’s novels also being published in the late 1980s, the expatriate writer then takes part in this project of revisionist history through fiction, which, according to Ananya Jahanara Kabir, is necessarily a multidirectional one (129).

I have not addressed Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1991), a Partition novel which is framed by brief references in the beginning to the Second World War, Germany, and Japan, and at its end by the appearance of the German-Jewish Dr Selzer. The novel is marked by large sections of focalisation through Lenny the young girl; child narrators have also been the subject of recent research in trauma and Holocaust studies. A comparison here would therefore be of particular interest, as the vision of the child (believing that “he is at the centre of the world and anything that happens to him is either done to please him or aimed at destroying him”, as Jean-Pierre Durix paraphrases Rushdie, 60) forms another intersection of post-Second World War literature and this postcolonial novel. It also addresses the role of women, a topic which would have exceeded the scope of this thesis but should be part of the larger discussion – especially in the context of the partition of India, where women were killed or forced to commit suicide out of fear the enemy would

rape or abduct them and taint family honour (see especially Butalia; Didur; and Mookerjee-Leonard). Children during the Partition chaos and the trafficking of women are also major concerns of Amit Majmudar's novel *Partitions* (2011). In its style, it does not resemble many of the other postmemorial texts: although it offers multiple perspectives and views of partition through a number of characters, the text is not held together by a frame narrative and an outer narrator who remembers or tells the story at a later point in time, nor does it seek other frames of reference outside South Asia. Stylistically, it therefore stands more in the tradition of testimonial reports of the eyewitness. Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009), in contrast, presents the reader with a plenitude of cross-cultural connections of historical traumas and atrocities, starting with the atomic bomb in Japan and India at around Partition and ending in Afghanistan and the USA of post-9/11. Compared to the texts looked at in this thesis, *Burnt Shadows* is even more transcultural and international. Its plethora of sentimental images and coincidences, however, also brings it close to kitsch, and it does not share the aim of the other texts explored here to call upon the active reader. As these examples show, further research in the field is needed to complement the findings of this thesis.

Resilience is so far a neglected topic in trauma studies and one that should arguably be addressed in future research, as it presents one of the major differences of postcolonial texts compared to Holocaust literature. For postcolonialism can offer a more optimistic and conciliatory view after trauma. The traumatic event might remain unspeakable; contemporary postcolonial literature, however, strives for ways out of this impasse and stasis towards "resistance and recovery" (Visser 278; for an optimistic outlook see also Eaglestone, "You would not add"; Saloul). Desai's negativity and the passiveness of her protagonist can then be understood as being restricted to the diegetic level whereas on the extratextual level, the reader becomes active in order not to share a similar fate as Hugo or to work against the human condition of suffering. As a result of the previously mentioned transcultural empathy, everyone involved and affected in this process can gain strength through what Stef Craps and Michael Rothberg call an "alliance between various marginalized groups" that is based on solidarity (518). Global responses to national uprisings show that people from different cultures can move beyond suffering understood as a competition. Humans are indeed capable of solidarity.

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